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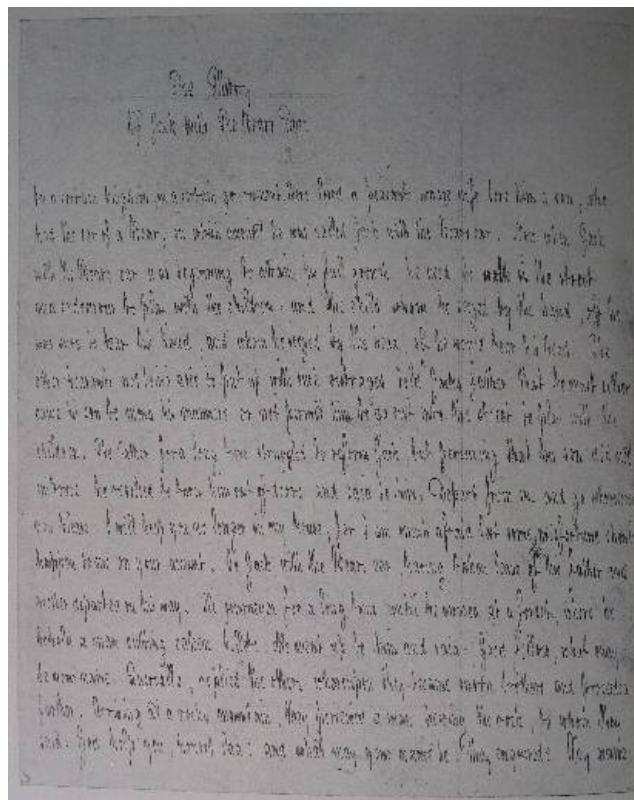
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STORY OF YVASHKA WITH THE
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THE STORY OF YVASHKA WITH THE BEAR'S EAR

Translated from the Russian

BY
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON:

INTRODUCTION

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The tale of *Yvashka; or, Jack with the Bear's Ear*, is a great favourite in Russia. Its main interest depends not so much on him of the Bear's Ear, or even his comrade, Moustacho, who angles for trout with his moustaches, as on Baba Yaga. This personage is the grand mythological demon of the Russians, and frequently makes her appearance in their popular tales, but perhaps in none plays so remarkable a part as in the story of *Yvashka*. A little information with respect to her will perhaps not be unacceptable to the reader before entering upon the story. She is said to be a huge female who goes driving about the steppes in a mortar, which she forces onward by pounding lustily with a pestle, though of course, being in a mortar, she cannot wield the pestle without hurting herself. As she hurries along she draws with her tongue, which is at least three yards long, a mark upon the dust, and with it seizes every living thing coming within her reach, which she swallows for the gratification of her ever-raging appetite. She has several young and handsome daughters whom she keeps in a deep well beneath her *izbushka* or cabin, which has neither door nor window, and stands upon the wildest part of the steppe upon crow's feet and is continually turning round. Whenever Baba Yaga meets a person she is in the habit of screaming out:—

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*"Oho, Oho!
I ne'er saw Russian wight till now,
But now the flesh of a Russian wight
I smell with nose and see with sight."*

Such is the Russian tradition about Baba Yaga, who is unlike in every respect any of the goblins and mythological monsters of Western Europe, except perhaps in her cry, which puts one in mind of the exclamation of the giant in the English nursery tale of Jack the Giant killer:—

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*"Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman."*

In the demon lore of the Turks, however, there is a ghostly being with which she seems to have considerable affinity. This goblin is called *Kara Conjulos*. *Kara Conjulos* is a female, and lives at the bottom of a well in a certain part of Constantinople, from which she emerges every night and drives about the city in a cart drawn by two buffaloes. She is much in the habit of stopping at caravansaries, going into the stables and breeding a confusion and a panic amongst the horses. She has several daughters, who occasionally accompany her in her expeditions and assist her in the commission of her pranks. A certain learned effendi, in a most curious Turkish book which he wrote about Constantinople, has a great deal to say concerning this goblin and her daughters, and amongst other things gives an account of a very bad night which he passed in a caravansary at some little distance from the city owing to the intrusion of *Kara Conjulos* and her bevy.

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Now for the story of *Yvashka*, or Jack.

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In a certain kingdom, in a certain government, there lived a peasant whose wife bore him a son who had the ear of a bear, on which account he was called *Yvashka*, or Jack with the Bear's Ear.

Now when Jack with the Bear's Ear was beginning to attain his full growth he used to walk in the street and endeavour to play with the children; and the child whom he seized by the hand, off he was sure to tear his hand, and whom he seized by the head, off he would tear his head. The other peasants, not being able to put up with such outrages, told Jack's father that he must either cause his son to mend his manners or not permit him to go out into the street to play with the children. The father for a long time struggled to reform Jack, but perceiving that his son did not improve he resolved to turn him out of doors, and said to him: "Depart from me and go wheresoever you please. I will keep you no longer in my house, for I am much afraid lest some misfortune should happen to me on your account."

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So Jack with the Bear's Ear, having taken leave of his father and mother, departed on his way. He journeyed for a long time until he arrived at a forest, where he beheld a man cutting oaken billets. He went up to him and said, "Good fellow, what may be your name?"

"Quercillo," replied the other, whereupon they became sworn brothers and proceeded farther. Arriving at a rocky mountain they perceived a man hewing the rock, to whom they said, "God help you, honest lad; and what may your name be?"

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"My name is Montano," replied he.

Whereupon they called him their brother, and proposed to him that he should leave off digging the mountain and should consent to go with them forthwith. He agreed to their proposal, and all three forthwith proceeded on their way, and journeyed for some time. Arriving at the bank of a river they saw a man sitting, who had a pair of enormous moustaches with which he angled for fish for his subsistence. They all three said to him, "God help you brother in your fish-catching."

"Thank you, brothers," he replied.

"What may your name be?" they inquired.

"Moustacho," he answered. Whereupon they called him also their brother and invited him to join their company, which he did not refuse. And so these four journeyed on, and whether they journeyed long or short, far or near, my tale will be soon told, though the deed was a long time in doing. At last they arrived at a forest, where they saw a cabin standing on crow's feet, which kept turning here and there. They went up to it, and said, "Cabin, cabin, stand with your rear to the wood and your front to us."

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The cabin instantly obeyed them, and they having entered it began to consult how they should contrive to live there. After that they all went into the forest, killed some game, and prepared food for themselves. On the second day they left Quercillo at home to cook the dinner, whilst they themselves went into the forest to hunt. Quercillo having got ready the dinner took his seat by the window and awaited the return of his brethren. At that moment came Baba Yaga riding on an iron mortar, which she urged on with the pestle, whilst with her tongue lolling out of her mouth she drew a mark on the earth as she went, and entering into the cabin she said:

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*"Till now ne'er a Russian wight
I've heard with ear, or seen with sight,
Now full clear I see and hear."*

Then turning to Quercillo she inquired, "Wherefore did you come hither, Quercillo?" Thereupon she began to beat him, and continued beating him until he was half dead, after which she devoured all the food which had been got ready, and then rode off.

Upon the return of Quercillo's comrades from the chase they asked him for their dinner, and he, not informing them that Baba Yaga had been there, said that he had fallen into a swoon, and had got nothing ready.

In the very same manner did Baba Yaga treat Montano and Moustacho. At last, it coming to the turn of Jack with the Bear's Ear to sit at home, he remained whilst his comrades went forth in quest of game. Jack cooked and roasted everything, and having found in Baba Yaga's cabin a pot of honey he placed a post by the perch, and having split it at the top he thrust in a wedge and emptied the honey upon the post. He himself sat on the perch, concealing behind him the post whilst he prepared three iron rods. After the lapse of a little time arrived Baba Yaga and screamed forth:

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*"Till now ne'er a Russian true
I've heard with ear, or seen with view,
Now I do both hear and view."*

"Wherefore have you come hither, Jack with the Bear's Ear, and why dost thou thus waste my property?" Whereupon she began to lick with her tongue about the post, and no sooner did her tongue arrive at the fissure than Jack snatched the wedge from out of the post, and having entrapped her tongue he leaped up from the perch, and scourged her with the iron rods until she begged that he would let her go, promising that he should be in peace from her and that she would never more come to him.

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Jack consented to her prayer, and having set her tongue at liberty he placed Baba Yaga in a corner whilst he himself sat by the window awaiting his companions, who soon returned and imagined that Baba Yaga had acted with him in the same manner as with themselves. But perceiving that he had the food all ready prepared they were much astonished thereat. After dinner he related how he had dealt with Baba Yaga, and laughed at them that they were unable to manage her. At last, wishing to show them the drubbed and beaten Baba Yaga he led them to the corner, but there she was no longer. So they resolved to go in pursuit of her, and having arrived at a stone they lifted it up and perceived a deep abyss, down which they thought of descending. But as none of his companions had courage enough to do this, Jack with the Bear's Ear consented to go. So they began to construct a cable, and having made a canoe for him to sit in they let him down into the gulf.

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Meanwhile Jack commanded them to wait for him a whole week, and provided during this time they received no intelligence of him to await no longer. "If I be alive and pull the rope draw up the canoe provided it be light; but if it be heavy cut the rope in order that you may not draw up Baba Yaga instead of me." Then having bid them farewell he descended into the deep subterranean abyss.

He remained there for a long time. At length he arrived at a cabin, which having entered he beheld three beautiful damsels sitting at their needle and embroidering with gold, and these were the daughters of Baba Yaga. As soon as they perceived Jack with the Bear's Ear they said,

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“Good youth, what has brought you hither? Here lives Baba Yaga, our mother, and as soon as she arrives you are a dead man, for she will slay you to a certainty; but if you will deliver us from this place we will give you information how you may save your life.”

He promised to conduct them out of that abyss, and they said to him, “As soon as our mother shall arrive she will cast herself upon you and begin to fight with you, but after that she will desist and will run into the cellar, where she has two pitchers standing filled with water; in the blue pitcher is the water of strength and in the white that of weakness.”

Scarcely had the daughters of Baba Yaga concluded their discourse when they heard their mother coming on the iron mortar driving with the pestle, whilst with her tongue lolling out of her mouth she drew a mark as she went, whereupon they acquainted Jack. Baba Yaga having arrived screamed out:

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*“Till now ne'er a Russ have I
Heard with ear or seen with eye,
Now do I both hear and spy.”*

“For what are you come hither, Jack with the Bear's Ear? Do you imagine to disturb me here also?”

Then casting herself suddenly upon him she began to fight. Both combated for a considerable time, and at length they fell upon the earth. Baba Yaga jumped up and ran into the cellar, whither Jack likewise rushed after her, and she without examining seized the white pitcher and Jack the blue one, and both drank; after that they went out of the cellar and recommenced their combat. Jack having overpowered her seized her by the hair and beat Baba Yaga with her own pestle. She began to entreat Jack to take pity upon her, promised to live at peace with him, and that very moment to depart from the place. Jack with the Bear's Ear consented thereto, and ceased beating Baba Yaga.

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As soon as she was departed he went to her daughters, thanked them for their information, and told them to prepare to leave the place. Whilst they were packing up their things he went to the rope, and having pulled at it his companions instantly let down the canoe, in which he placed the eldest sister, and by her sent word to them to draw them all up. Jack's comrades having drawn up the damsel were much astonished at the sight of her, but having learned from her the whole affair they hoisted up her other sisters. At last they let down the canoe for Jack, but he having this time stowed into the canoe many clothes and a great deal of money, and having likewise seated himself therein, his comrades feeling the weight imagined that it was Baba Yaga who sat there, and cutting the rope left poor Jack in the abyss. Thereupon they agreed to marry the damsels, and lost no time in so doing.

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In the meantime Jack with the Bear's Ear walked for a long time about this abyss seeking for an outlet. At last by good fortune he found in the gloomy place an iron door, which having broke open he proceeded for a long time in the same darkness; he then beheld a light at a distance, and directing his course straight towards it he emerged from the cavern. After this he determined to seek his comrades, whom he soon found, and the whole three were already married. Upon seeing them he began to ask them why they had left him in the hole. His comrades in great terror told Jack that it was Moustacho who had cut the rope, and him Jack immediately slew, and took his wife to be his own. Then they all lived together, and acquired great riches.

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