

Into The Forest

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PREFACE *by Lindy Ryan*

When the idea first came to put together a women-in-horror anthology, it took some time to decide on the theme. There have been several incredible female-focused anthologies of late. We wanted to add to that growing library with a collection that captured the very essence of those who identify as female horror writers: wild and fierce and feminine.

Baba Yaga is all of those and more. Thus, she became our muse and our subject.

With mortar and pestle in hand, we set out to create an anthology. Instead, we found a sisterhood. Hundreds of submissions flooded our call—stories from women worldwide, from every walk of life, and each breathtaking and inspiring in its own right. As we commenced the arduous but exciting task of selecting the right pieces for this collection, we were reminded of something wonderful. There is a wealth of talent among women-in-horror today and *women* in horror today. Wild women. Women with imagination, with power, and with voices demanding to be heard.

Women who, regardless of any differentiator that might be applied to separate us, retain the spirit of Baba Yaga.

Slavic in origin, many have grown up hearing folktales about Baba Yaga, though she will undoubtedly be new to some. Whether you're meeting Baba Yaga for the first time, or this is one of many trips to her familiar chicken-legged hut, we invite you to journey with us to meet the witch who waits deep in the forest and read her tales. Many will find her warm, while others will pronounce her wicked. These stories are, like Baba Yaga herself, limitless and unpredictable.

They are wild. They are fierce. And they are feminine.

Thank you to every woman who shared her story. Thank you to every contributor whose name appears in this book. Thank you to every reader who picks up this collection and finds their sisterhood.

We are Baba Yaga, and it is with great delight that we take you *into the forest...*

DINNER PLANS WITH BABA YAGA *A Poem by Stephanie M. Wytovich*

I tattoo a chicken's foot onto my thigh, your eye
a looking glass resting atop my bones. I walk on
broken acorns, braid my hair with the thread from
a lost boy's jacket. You scream from the pepper
plant growing on my porch, and I nod and nod,
agree with the spells pouring out of the earth.

*I'll be sure to mind the roots,
collect the honey from the hives*

You tell me to make a stew, to chop up the
onions, pull the radishes from the ground. I bite
my tongue, let my tears fall into the bowl, the salt
a sealant, a locked door boiling beneath the peas.
I stir clockwise to summon you, imagine the rancid
perfume of your ghost.

*Yes, I have spiced the two-lips,
marinated the girl meat overnight*

There's a routine to this, a ritual, the way
the kettle is forever on, screaming like a dying
red fox. I drink a broth made from feathers stewed
with baby teeth and sage, chop up potatoes
still covered in dirt, half-eaten by wireworms,
the taste of flea beetles still strong on my tongue.

*I put the rhubarb on the table,
milk the snake over the sink*

At nightfall, the scent of jasmine mixes
with the pine needles on the porch, cuts
through the musk of leftover promises
still lingering in the woods. If you listen closely,
there's a song in your soup, an alphabet
in your blood, each mouthful a child lost,
a child consumed.

*I throw their clothes in the fire,
Eat their names under the light of the moon.*