Grandma Chickenlegs

Geraldine McCaughrean
Moira Kemp, Illustrator
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After young Tatia's mother dies, her father remarries a woman with "eyes as sharp as needles and a soul as thin as a thread." Poor Tatia is left with only her mother's parting words and a rag doll named Drooga to protect her. The stepmother, hoping to get rid of the child, sends her to Grandma Chickenlegs to fetch a needle. In spite of having been warned by her mother to beware of Grandma Chickenlegs, Tatia must obey. After discovering that it is not the witch, but her house that has legs like a chicken, Tatia realizes the old woman plans on eating her! Fortunately, armed with her own kindness and the quick-witted Drooga's instructions, the brave heroine outsmarts the iron-toothed witch, and all ends happily.

A rich retelling of the traditional Russian Baba Yaga story, Grandma Chickenlegs balances humorous drawings with this sometimes gruesome folktale, creating a pleasing combination. Although McCaughrean changes the original story somewhat, the additions of a dog and cat character add to the tale's charm. Kemp's colored pencil illustrations, full of greens and oranges, can scarcely contain the action. The plump witch, with her spider earrings, green skin and striped tights, is scary and funny at the same time. This well designed book is one that children will surely ask to read more than once.

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