

ASK BABA YAGA

Otherworldly Advice for Everyday Troubles



Taisia Kitaiskaia

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Andrews McMeel
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МОИМ МАМЕ И ПАПЕ
For my mother and father



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

BABA & ME

Baba Yaga was a potent presence in the wild, dense Siberian woods where I formed my earliest memories. My family's *dachya* (summer house) was right up against a forest roamed by bears and wolves. After days of berry picking and mushroom gathering, my parents told me fairy tales about this ancient trickster witch—sometimes cruel, sometimes generous, always dangerous. In one tale, the young maiden Vasilisa risks her life to seek guidance from the human-eating Baba. Vasilisa knocks on the door of the strange hut, which stands on chicken legs. Vasilisa is lucky, and instead of cooking her in a cauldron, Baba presents the brave girl with a human skull. The skull, glowing mysteriously from the inside, serves as a lantern. It saves Vasilisa, illuminating her forest path through the dark night, taking her where she needs to go.

When I was all grown up and living far from Baba's woods, I tried to find my way back to such enchanted lands. To get to know Baba Yaga better, I asked her questions on paper (*What do you look like? What do you keep in your house?*) and wrote down her answers. Baba's spirit ignored my queries but immediately began investigating *my* life. She even offered some unsolicited advice.

Spooked and thrilled, I communed with Baba Yaga every week for two years. Strangers sent questions that agitated and ached my human heart but found clarity in Baba's supernatural one. I listened to her pronouncements and recorded these answers on a typewriter as best I could.

Indifferent and immortal, Baba offers no comforting pats on the back. But she can extend—with her gnarled, clawed hand—a glowing skull lantern. If you keep your nerve, that eerie light might just guide you through.

Be well, and beware,
Taisia Kitaiskaia

CONTENTS



LOVE CAULDRONS

How do I survive the dating world?

Why am I such a lusty boar?

She won't date me; what do I do?

Will I die alone?

Why can't I stop falling in love?

How can I be happy for my ex?

How do I stop worrying about finding a mate?

Why doesn't he want to marry me?

How do I keep living with my ex?

Should I have broken up with him?

Where are the legit dudes?

Why do I keep getting sidetracked by romance?

How can I deal with jealousy?

Am I missing all the boats?

How can I trust men again?

How do I keep from dwelling on the love I haven't had?

How do I end an affair?
How do I demonstrate my love?
How will I know when it's time to end it?
Why can't I stop thinking about marriage?
Should I wait for her?
How do I move on?
Is a man ever worth fighting for?
Why am I so shallow?
How do I make room for another love?
How can I give fewer fucks?
Will lost love be regained?
How do I stop worrying about an unlikely relationship?
How do relationships survive mental illness?
Why does no one want to date me?
Will I ever fall in love again?

GOOD IN YOUR BONES

Am I no good?
How can I let go of a painful memory?
Why do I keep getting drunk on weeknights?
How can I coexist with my family?
Am I better than everyone?
How do I be social again?
How do I stop lashing out?

Should I break up with my friend?

Is it okay to be an introvert?

Where has my spine gone?

Is intuition real?

How do I call out my friends?

Is it possible to thrive in the face of
chronic illness?

How can I kill my ego?

How can I stop being my own worst enemy?

How do I become more comfortable with myself?

Am I unlovable?

How do I get my body to work in concert with itself?

Does this one physical feature make me grotesque?

How do I open up?

How do I help someone who has always been unhappy?

I'm a terrible person; what now?

How do I deal with the ugly view out my window?

Where have my nightmares gone?

How do I protect myself from drama?

How do I feel my feelings?

What do people see in my boredom?

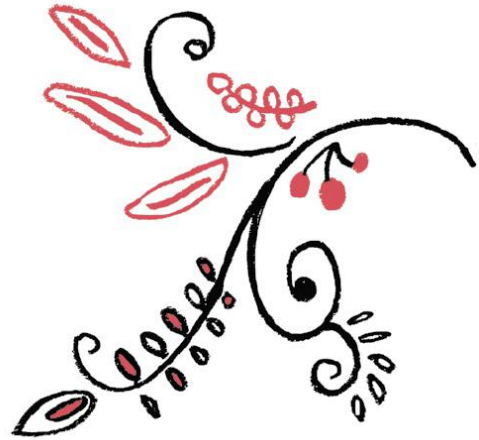
How can I make good friendships?

Has my heart gone cold?

Should I be less shy?

How can I transform trauma into peace and hope?

Should I put out the fire in my belly?



Why am I so mediocre?

How do I stop eating sweets?

How do I keep politics from destroying my relationship with my family?

How do I stop my gross habits?

Does my summertime depression have to feel so bad?

How do I break out of my hermit shell?

How can I forgive my mother?

How do I stop hating everyone?

Why do I crave male attention so much?

How can I trust my body again?

How do I stop feeling so guilty?

Am I wasting my kindness?

Does my son still need my help?

How can I be authentically positive?



THE FOREST PATH

Do I have to choose between love and career?

What is missing?

How can I say no to TV?

How do I deal with new career stress?

How can I learn patience?

How do I get back on the horse?

How do I bring back the magic?

Where does all the time go?

How do I distinguish prestige from
happiness?

How do I decide between two careers?

What's the point?

Should I be reckless?

Will I always be let down?

How do I keep the spark going?

Why are adults so obsessed with work?

How do I move forward after a blinding revelation?

How can I deal with the comings and goings of people?

How do I commit to the life I have?

Will moving heal me?

Will my life ever be this good again?

How do I stop procrastinating?

Am I mistaking adventure for destruction?

How do I abandon my striving for glory?

Should I keep putting myself "out there"?

How do I create stability?

How do I get rid of my work ethic?

How do I structure my life?

Is my life change a mistake?

How can I enjoy the moment?

How do I help people who resent me?

Should I move to a new city?

How do I get over my terrible boss?



What does it mean to be a mother?

My life has a hole in its center; how do I
go on?

How do I become less fearful about
money?

How do I deal with my grouchy coworker?

Can generations be reconciled?

How do I make the most of my free time?

How do I put more pressure on myself?

Where should I put my energy?

How can I make peace with death?

What if everything I've ever wanted comes true?

About the Author





LOVE



CAULDRONS

HOW DO I SURVIVE THE DATING WORLD?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I survive dating in a world where people seem afraid of being vulnerable?

BABA YAGA:

When we live) in our snail-shells, :to see a cracked one feels ugly—we watch the slimy slug, naked & shivering, and everyone feels ashamed to look. But if this slug were to undulate and wobble, if it were to find sweeter sprouts with its sleek body, if we could see this creature be unafraid, we would not be so squeamish. ; Be the first slug.

WHY AM I SUCH A LUSTY BOAR?

Dear Baba Yaga,

When I was in a relationship, talking to the opposite sex came easily. Now that I'm out of one, I feel a sexual tension and angst with almost any conversation. How do I learn to be myself again?

BABA YAGA:

You're an itchy boar in the woods, feeling for the first time its boar bristles. ;Rub up against a tree & laugh at yr prickly skin&fur. Into such a laughter-hole you may fall, & begin the serious journey of knowing the tunnel of yrself.

SHE WON'T DATE ME; WHAT DO I DO?

Dear Baba,

I have recently fallen in love with a girl. We're so perfect for each other that it annoys her—but, alas, she won't date me, even though she tells me that she loves me and that I am someone to grow old with. Baba—I'm confused. Is it that I'm not cute? My hair is looking excellent today, and I even showered. Can you help me? Perhaps bewitch her so she'll love me forever? My heart is a big, lumpy piece of brick.

P.S. Can you also make her less crazy? I love her, but she annoys the hell out of me. By the way, she just read that last bit over my shoulder and wants to kill me right now. Oh, Baba ... can you make me smarter, too?

BABA YAGA:

)You two; are as potatoes overgrown with sprouted eyes, all tangled-up in each other's growth. Love there may be but sense there is not, so stop wishing for all to be so clean. If you wish to wallow in the root cellar, know you will be visited by foully breaths & bored spirits of the kitchen. Nurse a map & go elsewhere. or accept that you both love the malaise & confusions, suck the rot from each other's

toes & wake for several more months to the consternations
of yr silly vegetable faces. , irritable and not wholly adoring.

WILL I DIE ALONE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My best friend just got engaged, and all I can do is weep, left alone as the last of the single ladies in my circle of friends. How do I suck it up, move on, and be happy for her when all I do is fear I will die alone, eaten by squirrels and badgers in the wilderness? How do I find my own happiness along the way?

BABA YAGA:

Everyone dies, alone in their own cauldron—yr death will be no more or less gruesome than any other's. & happiness is a thing that passes through you, not a thing you meet & hold in yr deathly grip for ever afterwards. You are afraid; of being the last at a party without the others, but the others have gone on into a wood they do not understand. It is the same wood you stand in, weeping. & the trees look at all of you the same, & say nothing.



WHY CAN'T I STOP FALLING IN LOVE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I can't stop falling head over heels. I was in love with someone, but it didn't work, and now I am falling for someone else: someone I think may like me, at least, but who is also far away and is very close friends with the previous someone. I am torn between wanting him, suddenly, intensely, and wanting to be free and quiet and still. How can I stop thinking about the way it felt to dance drunk with him at midnight?

BABA YAGA:

There's a whirling in yr brain, but inside every; whirling is a quiet, after the howl undoes itself. You can keep sliding down its spirals or you can sniff out the still spot and put yr toe in it & let it suck you in. Either one, loving or not;loving, is a sucking in. You choose yr sink-hole, knowing that always will there be more Whirlings & more absences stuck to those fragrant ribs.



HOW CAN I BE HAPPY FOR MY EX?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My ex and I were together 4.5 years before I broke up with him. Even though he loved me and was good to me, I have never been happier about myself and my life until we split up. So why did I get so angry when I found out that he's been dating someone new? And how can I stop feeling this way and be happy for him?

BABA YAGA:

You feel he is the cub you helped raise, & his fur you love even as you don't wish it near you. ; So when he goes out yonder to eat his fill you anger that he can wander so easily & find what he seeks without you.) Stare into the black puddle where he left his paw print, stare & mourn a little, let yr grieving mix with that abandoned water & drink it all down, the loss of him & the loss of you, too, a little, for he raised you also.

HOW DO I STOP WORRYING ABOUT FINDING A MATE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I find myself happy in most areas of my life (professionally, intellectually, socially). However, as I've tiptoed into my thirties, I've become increasingly anxious about finding a mate. It's distracting me from my otherwise quite pleasant existence. How can I quit worrying about it and let it happen when it happens?

BABA YAGA:

a foul wind follows the craving of minds after the seeking. (It is made such that you'll always be wanting this, if indeed it is something you want. ;Why are you asking for the pain to be taken wholesome from yr life, if most is well & only one lacking? There's always something) making clicks & clacks behind us, pushing us forward with a somewhat fear. No one's road is silent.

WHY DOESN'T HE WANT TO MARRY ME?

Dear Baba Yaga,

The person I live with, love, and want to marry says he loves me but doesn't want to get married. I don't know if I'm more of a fool to stay with someone who won't honor me with a permanent commitment or to place so much weight on a promise that, after all, is not any assurance of future happiness or stability. If everything else is good, why does this feel so important?

BABA YAGA:

A door stands alone in the forest.)Once you walk through & swing its hinges, you enter into the same woods as before. But for some the walking through holds magic ; for some it is a strange & needless task. In truth, there are many mysterious doors & tunnels in the forest. Would you not wish to travel with someone who feels the same pull towards such portals?

HOW DO I KEEP LIVING WITH MY EX?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My boyfriend dumped me with two months left on our lease. He still lives in the house and wants to spend time with me like we didn't break up. My heart hurts, and I feel confused on a physical level. I know I need to move on, but I have no private place to heal. How can I take care of myself until he moves out?

BABA YAGA:

It is not good to live with such a large rat, such noisy cheese-nibblings, such large & everywhere droppings. It was his choice to turn into a rat; it is yrs to ask the rat to leave, or leave yrself. No one can rest with such nightly gnawings at the heart.





SHOULD I HAVE BROKEN UP WITH HIM?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I recently broke up with my boyfriend, who is one of the kindest and most boring people I have ever met. Was that the right choice? Doesn't boringness cancel out kindness? Will I find someone kind and interesting?

BABA YAGA:

If a man is a stump filled ; with goodness, he is still a stump. Choose men as alive as you want to be in yr own human flesh.

WHERE ARE THE LEGIT DUDES?

Dear Baba Yaga,

As the years pass on, I become more and more disillusioned with men. Are all the legit dudes hiding somewhere? How do I rekindle my belief in men?

BABA YAGA:

You seek too much. , You are like a hawk flying over the canopy & all the tender little ones hide, afraid. ;Why do you need to hold one in yr talons & call him yrs? Use yr beak & strength to gather berries & make a goodly nest in which you wish to live. & then some handsome & unseen creature may present himself, equal to yr plumage, yr sharp quick eye.



WHY DO I KEEP GETTING SIDETRACKED BY ROMANCE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have recently concluded a third failed romantic relationship in as many years, and I am completely worn out and fed up with this waste of my time and energy. I am completely content being single and have many career ambitions to focus on towards accomplishing goals in my life versus draining my resources (emotions, money, time, etc.) on another futile connection. How would you advise me in remaining on the straight and narrow without becoming sidetracked with romantic involvements? Accountability? A vision board? Not leaving the house? I'm SO FED UP with heartbreak and failure; all I want is to make progress and be happy.

BABA YAGA:

You, will always be wanting; love—so throw yr vision board back into its hell river. :Every being seeks what it wants & you seek romances, & then they fail. ,Why? You already know. It is only) in yr avoidance of this knowing that you must fail & fail again.; & straight & narrow paths are made by those who do not know the forest, & fear it, & hack it open blind. Be a better woodsdweller & do not cut down

every tree you meet, but first ask why it is there, & know it
—only then.can you get through the woodshouse safely.

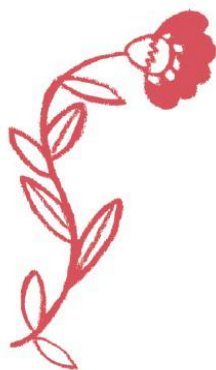
HOW CAN I DEAL WITH JEALOUSY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have had the misfortune of meeting five of my boyfriend's past partners. Some ex-girlfriends, some just friends he happened to sleep with. Some of these women are my peers whom I encounter frequently in social settings. I recognize everyone has a past. However, I experience various negative emotions ranging from jealousy to anger. How do I deal with this gracefully?

BABA YAGA:

Once you knew these women; as ex-lovers of this man's, they became as covered with thick, sweet, poisonous syrup. Getting(close to them, even looking at them—yr hands & tongue lick up the syrup & make you Sick. Yr man slathered in this syrup when he said unto you who they were; damages done now. Stay far away from the syrup, for you are a little mortal one.



AM I MISSING ALL THE BOATS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I'm 33 years old, and I have been single for almost NINE YEARS. I haven't been unhappy! Or at least only sort of. But I feel like I'm hiding from life in my endless single-ness. I think I could be happy in a relationship, but I haven't even really tried. I haven't really sought out, or stumbled on, anything. Everywhere I look, friends are getting married and having babies. I feel like I'm missing the boat. I feel like I'm missing all the boats! What should I do? Should I force myself to get out there? Should I accept myself as is? Love feels so distant and alien and unfathomable to me now.

BABA YAGA:

) You are too young to stand on the land forever. There will always be boats, but is it truly that you wish to catch your first when you are Crone? —To be . a true Well & Good Crone as I you must have had many transformations, many lives & shapes. What is : distant alien unfathomable is what boat-riders go in seek of. You have much time yet to spend in comfort & the being with things you know. If unspoken to, what is alien & unfathomable in you will drag behind you (always like a mangled & uncared-for vessel.

HOW CAN I TRUST MEN AGAIN?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I trust men when so many have hurt me in the past?

BABA YAGA:

Let me tell you , a tale. Sole creature that has no fear is my cat. Once she & I wandered to the pond for poisonous roots. There Cat saw a turtle—to her he was so splendid. For her love, he bit her on the nose. She bled & bled. But next times we went pondwise, Cat looked again for the turtle, her beloved. Cat has now been bitten 13 ways; her nose is nearly missing. Still her eyes gleam for the turtle. Sometimes trust has smaller jaws than want.



HOW DO I KEEP FROM DWELLING ON THE LOVE I
HAVEN'T HAD?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I'm overwhelmed by a sense of loss for the relationships I haven't had. Due to various circumstances, I've had very long periods of being alone. Up until recently, I was seeing someone (the first in a long time) who moved on from me to another person like it was the simplest thing in the world. Not only am I jealous of the ease with which he establishes romantic connections but also being with him showed me what I've been missing out on—sex, emotional intimacy—and I can't shake my sadness at the fact that this huge thing has been missing from my life. I know I need to make some changes going forward, but how do I keep from dwelling on the love I haven't had?

BABA YAGA:

The life of every being has , some vast emptiness in it. Unspeakable, grievous. ;There is a field in the middle of my wood where no one goes. It is the heart of my loneliness. I go there to dance & be quiet. & I love the intensity of its silence. If I were human I would wish to take another there. You must know every contour of yr emptiness before you

can know whom you wish to invite in.

HOW DO I END AN AFFAIR?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have been having an affair for nearly a year and a half with a man who has a wife and a very young child. I'm essentially married, too; I've been with my boyfriend for almost ten years, and I absolutely adore him. Although I experience constant ambivalence towards this man, I continue our affair because the sexual chemistry is otherworldly. Neither of us wants to leave their spouse. I know I should end it because I am damaging innocent people with my selfishness, but I do not want to stop. How can I let this go once and for all?

BABA YAGA:

You think you are Queen & King, with such royal power as to ruin innocents. But you are small, frightened animals hiding in the woods ; yr crowns are larger than yr bodies, they have fallen to the forest floor & you tremble within them. Yr crowns are the falsehoods you tell yrselves, caging you in. Once you see how little you've become, you will think not of the innocents but of yrselves, & how you miss the prouder sizes you once were.

HOW DO I DEMONSTRATE MY LOVE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

This summer I fell in love after thinking for so long that true love wasn't possible for me anymore. Now that I have it, I get the fear of muddling it all up without even knowing, when all I want is so desperately to be good. How do I get rid of these feelings, Baba Yaga? How do I make it known how deep running my love is during times of duress?

BABA YAGA:

presently;you are as in a glass boat with this woman. and wondrous it is to see the creatures & sea-men & ladies & orbs glowing. but sea is deep: there are , Twisted things there, tentacled & struck with dark longings. watch as they suck the coolness of the glass but know you are safely inside though yr eyes do not shut.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO END IT?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How can I enjoy my wonderful relationship, knowing that it will eventually end because we want different things in life, and how will I know when it is time to say goodbye and move on to new things, despite the pain?

BABA YAGA:

)By the sea there is always the stinging salt, always the grief of what is to come, but mostly what you know—is unleashed light. But when it starts to grieve everywhere, all at once, & the cold & the blue & then the dark, then that is what you know;.





WHY CAN'T I STOP THINKING ABOUT MARRIAGE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

All I can think about is getting married to the man I've been in love with for a few short months. I know this is unreasonable as I'm only in my midtwenties and an ambitious and independent woman. It also worries me as I'm a foolish romantic, always have been, and always think this way, no matter how many people I fall in love with. I want to simply enjoy this romance and stop being an idiot. Please soothe or correct me.

BABA YAGA:

No sootheings shall there be, wench.) The longing & wondering is half the joys; of this deathlove pond you've a-stumbled into. Now you look up with milkweeds in yr hair & ask the Moose for answers. :Splash around & do not be so hollow-hallowed; every loving has a death sentence, no matters the babies born or wedding arches. If you, must know all the futures so be it but price is high: scrape & spit out yr own teeth & read them as Diviner in the palm of yr hand. Then ask yr bloodied mouth how yr princely loves you now haha.;

SHOULD I WAIT FOR HER?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I'm falling deeply for a close friend who is about to go through a divorce. She has feelings for me as well, but she is nowhere near a place where she could start a new relationship. I want to wait for her, but the longer I wait, the more certain I am that I am lost. Should I wait for her, or should I walk away? Where would I even go?

BABA YAGA:

She is walking out of one world & into another. & in between she is, where the rules of earth do not hold. ; You are lost because you hold a tether to the lost, & the tether is slight & fragile, a thread that could break from weather or wind or time or because she chooses to cut it. (When will she deem to come down, & will it be to you that she goes? It is not . for you to know. If you go, go back to the earth that you loved (if you did love it). But in truth if you go or stay is no difference—the only matter is if you look to the earth where you are or look up to the sky where she wanders, barely visible to you, so far you know not what are all her changes. For you have not gone anywhere, & the earth is still yr home.

HOW DO I MOVE ON?

Dear Baba Yaga,

A few years ago, a relationship that meant the world to me fell apart in a fairly traumatic way. I have since fallen in love again but can't stop fixating on the old wound and rehashing painful memories. How do I forget the road not taken? How do I leave the past in the past and move on with my life?

BABA YAGA:

There are no roads for you other ; than the one you walk. The past is more) beautiful to look on than the walking you know now—it is tattered in a lovely way, you pick it up to look & feel, you run yr hands over it. It is a thing, & things seethe & groan but they are not the movement & nary the walking. Yr gait is simple & it carries you, it is the only sure thing. & the tatters will crumble even more whether you touch them or not.



IS A MAN EVER WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Is a man ever worth fighting for? My boyfriend's devotion to me has come into question. He says he wants to be with me but considers falling in love with another. Is this my opportunity for growth within our relationship, or will I grow stronger if I strike out on my own?

BABA YAGA:

If you go ; yr body will feel a shock, cold & cold everything within you—& then you will be yrself again, strong & solitary, vigorous from yr icy swim & knowing you could make the swim again.) If you stay, you may float for a long day, somewhere above the earth, feeling always the many winds—warm or deadly, but always the lightness, always the air of you high & waiting, yr heart loud & yr lungs thinking. & after this day passes you will find yrself hitting the earth again, strong & solitary even if not alone—. So , do you wish for the sky-life, somewhere in you, or are you ready for the swim?

WHY AM I SO SHALLOW?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am a serial dater. I find myself continually looking for a unicorn and, as a result, sabotaging relationships with people who would have made good long-term partners. I confess that all my grievances center around appearance. Initially attracted to the women I date, I begin dissecting their appearance, noting every imperfection until I can no longer look at them. I suspect this issue is rooted in my infatuation with my own appearance, but I'm not sure. Why am I so shallow?

BABA YAGA:

I have seen in my time . 6 unicorns and each had some ugliness: one too toothy; one with undelicious sag to the rump; one's horn too shiny, made my eyes bleed; fourth, splotchy on the teats; the other 2, dead. What is seen ; as you peer at the creatures is Asymmetry & Decay of all things, of yrself. Run yr hand through yr own mane and feel the thick life pushing out the hair-roots, in beauty and ugliness, but always life and then the dying at the tips. :Repulsed by the pulsing, yr frightened neighing echoes back at you. But be still. Shut yr eyes, keep watching the pulse.

HOW DO I MAKE ROOM FOR ANOTHER LOVE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Last year I met the love of my life during harrowing circumstances. As we fell in love, he was also falling into a deep depression. When he hit rock bottom, we had to end so he could heal on his own. I don't know how long that will take or if he will ever be with me again. How do I place my love for him to the side, so I can try making room for another?

BABA YAGA:

Love cannot be so easily placed aside—where would you put it? ;No—the love will work through you in its grieving ways & spell its strange and painful phantasms through yr body. But waiting you must not do. Nothing, is coming for you. It is only you moving(forward and around , & there will be fine makings for you as you do so. But you cannot conjure another to do yr bidding.

HOW CAN I GIVE FEWER FUCKS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I find myself in a relationship that is generally socially unacceptable. A whole community of people actively frowns upon the idea of us being together. How can I learn to give fewer fucks about what these people think?

BABA YAGA:

I give you this cauldron : open it, & out of it comes a laugh, an enormous laugh with the power of wind, it winds around you and the humans who frown, it wraps around yr love, it is so loud & thick that you must close yr eyes & ears, it lasts for a day & a night. .When it is done & gone, you look around again—what do you see? The land has been blasted by it, it has changed everything, & no one remembers what happened before it stormed the village.



WILL LOST LOVE BE REGAINED?

Dear Baba,

Will lost love be regained? Can time heal a festering heart-wound, or will I be caught by fever? Help me, Baba: you know infection spoils the meat.

BABA YAGA:

If yr heart spoils; give it to a dog.) & he will love the good meat. now it is hard alive, but yr heart is alive in the running mouth. out of a jeweled solitude bath you rise Damasked & flushly. Yr life is yr own even if it barks like a dog.



HOW DO I STOP WORRYING ABOUT AN UNLIKELY
RELATIONSHIP?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I stop spending too much time and energy worrying
over someone I will probably never be with?

BABA YAGA:

You cannot choose the fly that mucks up yr stew, but you
can choose to throw the pot out the window. ;Throw it
joyously—then go picking strange & goodly fruits to make a
sweet new pot, & let yrself wander free into new gardens &
tarry long. You have been too much , forlornly looking at
the pest.

HOW DO RELATIONSHIPS SURVIVE MENTAL ILLNESS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My partner is going through a mental health crisis. It's been about a month now, and I feel worn down and exhausted and sad. I love her so much, but when she's hysterical and asking me if I'm going to leave her, sometimes the answer feels like yes. How do relationships survive mental illness?

BABA YAGA:

One pale tree cannot give its sap to another. If you are a strong & ancient spruce, you may withstand some sap-letting. If you know yrself to be a thin birch, there is no grief in saying so. ;Even the spruce knows, its bleeding saves nobody.



WHY DOES NO ONE WANT TO DATE ME?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I've always been able to make friends and have people love me platonically, but I've never had anyone really fall in love with me romantically. I'm easily thought of as cool and a great and supportive friend, but this doesn't translate into the dating world. Can I remedy this?

BABA YAGA:

There is , in some forgotten creek in yr woods a small tortoise shell loaded with jewels—covering the wellspring of that dried aquifer. In this shell you ; have hoarded all yr pretty qualities, you have carefully placed the shiny heavy stones you think will make others) love you. But in gathering them so you have hidden them; lift the shell—let the waters rise back up & flood the stream; let the water blast the shell open & carry yr precious gems far & wide. It is in this wild rushing & abandon of what you believe makes you lovable that others will see you as a raw creature to be chased & peered at.

WILL I EVER FALL IN LOVE AGAIN?

Dear Baba Yaga,

For years I fell in love so easily and was so eager to please my partners. I have now been single for two years, and when I date new people, I find myself less interested, more critical, and in “What are you bringing to the table?” mode. I still love my passions, family, and friends fiercely, but I feel deeply underwhelmed by the potential lovers I meet. Will I ever fall in love again?

BABA YAGA:

Only a fool would welcome a soiled table of crumbs & empty bottles. Let them, those who would feast, bring jugs & baskets, bring fruits & goodly onions. Yr table is not for the vagrants or the doomed. ; (Yr table is for the sweet dark wine & the tender herbs & a good eye winking at you above a full glass. Wait for the , guest who carries fresh meats, & until then, eat yr fine soups by yrself, & open the windows so the birds may come in yr house & charm yr table with their beauty.

GOOD IN



YOUR BONES

AM I NO GOOD?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Sometimes I think I'm no, no good at all. There is a wasp in the garage I cannot face. I complete the bare minimum of my responsibilities and chew words until the flavor's gone, until they cannot do as I ask. Will I ever stop loafing and become a good writer? Are you ever afraid? Blessings.

BABA YAGA:

)Yr mind is as a wasp's nest making, no honey & only stinging its own walls. That is a papery well in which to reside, gray & dust on the tongue. It is; not in the asking of the question but in the daily answering that is yr toil & plunder. & some nests are long-abandoned & think they are still filled with Nervous life. Are you still of this mind or have you moved to another?) If you inhabit then do so by the aching minutes. & as for me fear is a pushcart I roll jolly—down the hill & the faster it rides the faster do my Wounds in my heart flush with wind & so am I most blood-fueled and living in my deathly glory on this earth.

HOW CAN I LET GO OF A PAINFUL MEMORY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do you know when it's time to let go of a painful memory?

BABA YAGA:

Each memory is a bright fish you drop into the black sea. It is no longer yours; it lives its own life, jumping from the water at its will. Many of us, are so haunted by one fish or even a school of such. But know this : even ghost fish meet their end. Next times you see that bright lurk in the waves, say this spell:

One day you will age,

You little wretch,

Sicken & stop beating.

I'll be here, on the shore,

When you are picked

Apart by sea-worms.



WHY DO I KEEP GETTING DRUNK ON WEEKNIGHTS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Why do I keep getting drunk on weeknights? Then I go into work, weepy and ashamed. I do it only once a week, different nights. I went to an AA meeting, but I don't think I am an alcoholic; I don't drink on weekends. What do I do?

BABA YAGA:

Yr, feareye is askance &. Look ing falsely. Yr foot is hopping into the fireplace but you look out the window at yr lover. Mind the burning, tend the fire, ask me the real question when you see it Peering.



HOW CAN I COEXIST WITH MY FAMILY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I feel tired and ill and powerless when I spend time with my family. They love me very much, and I love them, but I still feel like an alien around them. How can I learn to spend time with them and not feel exhausted and depressed afterward?

BABA YAGA:

With your family, you are as planet—fixed & solitary in your orbits, & you; the coldest loneliest one,. But this is not:the you-yourself. Neither is it the truth of yr family that they are such. ;Remember the animal of you with its heat & hunger, pacing the stars & tearing them open. ;So is yr family made of need&itching bones. Angry as it is, the stew of all yr bones together is better & truer than All yr mutely orbiting. Feel yr own meat & howl out to theirs when the fire draws you close.



AM I BETTER THAN EVERYONE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I've been pestered by this nagging thought that I'm better than everyone else. This just seems ridiculous! However, I keep convincing myself that I say better things or that I am a better person than those around me. I am either incredibly brilliant or terribly arrogant. How do I know which is true?

BABA YAGA:

You , can rest in peace—you are not better than everyone, otherwise you would not be sending this question to the Baba. ;If others knew you as I know you now, they would laugh & no longer look at you so sweetly. —then you would loathe them & yrself & sink down into the well so deep that only Arrogance could haul you back up. Recall what it is that first brought you down that well, many years ago. What sunk you then?: For neither are you arrogant, but secretly & hiddenly scared. Who are you afraid of being once more? Once you know answer, you will stop plaguing both me & yrself with these foolish thoughts. To be plunged down into doubt of self & then rushed up to superiority is the ancientest of humanly pastimes. , Step away from the well & take a stroll—I am sure you will find an even livelier

occupation.

HOW DO I BE SOCIAL AGAIN?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I can't socialize anymore. I will stand with a group of friends and feel like I'm underwater while they talk and giggle. I don't know what to say, and when they look at me, I am terrified they are sensing my weirdness and it will push them away. I used to be bubbly and know how to have fun. Now I'm worried nobody could possibly want to be my friend. How do I join my friends and loved ones on the surface?

BABA YAGA:

Forget about the others. :What you need is something else now. You need to ask; yourself—Why am I underwater? & deal with this & meanwhile the others will wait. No one pays attention to a quiet creek ; likely few have noticed yr still surface. & those who have & who love you will stand near & know you in yr new way, as long as it lasts.) They , will be the ones who matter. But do not flail & gasp on their account—you will only swallow water, & drown deeper. :Look to see what, it is that pushed you down,& hold yr breath for now.

HOW DO I STOP LASHING OUT?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Lately I have been poisonous. The smallest thing can provoke me to cruelty. I have been like this in the past and have worked on gradually learning to calm myself and choose kindness, but in the past few weeks I've been lashing out at my partner and my friends alike. I know I'm doing it and can't stop; it feels too good. How do I stop attacking those I love?

BABA YAGA:

What you are—fiending; is to give out kindness & dole out cruelty, & these hills & valleys you so make are what keep you, exalted in yrself in yr nastiness & in yr niceness. But neither nastiness nor niceness lives in love, and you) are not seeing the landscape of yrself. ;Who you hurt mostly is yrself: what you do to others is slight compared to the strange doings within yrself. Leave them far alone & look to all yr lands & forests, for there are so many of them, & you know them so hardly, & every of their shapes has its glory, & when you see them you will love them, for you will have no; other choice.

SHOULD I BREAK UP WITH MY FRIEND?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have a friend who ignores me until she needs me. The second I'm not of use, she pretends I don't exist. I want to cut her out of my life, but when we do get together, we always have so much fun. At what point do you stop maintaining a friendship? How can I steel myself for the next time she comes running back?

BABA YAGA:

As if lost, you have been standing by one tree, waiting. Through mornings, nights, dew snow rain. Grown small and cold, you feel being found is such great happiness. :Don't you know, you are not lost? Walk out from yr imagined captivity and cross paths with grander kinships. The running one runs past—she can't grasp you now.



IS IT OKAY TO BE AN INTROVERT?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am an introverted person and generally happier when I am alone. But I often feel that others are judging me and think that I'm weird because I don't have a significant other or kids by this time in my life. I don't think this judgment is all in my head. How can I become more comfortable with the life that I have chosen for myself?

BABA YAGA:

It is strong to be yr own creature, to carry the weight of yr life on yr own back. & it is strong & strange to be unknown by others, to do:all the knowing yrself. But love must be weaving in & out of you somewhere.)Where , is it going, where does it come from? If you can answer abundantly, you are a Whole creature, & must be held in great awe by those who question you.; For I am such a being & it is a great honor to be unseen by the earthly, but to love & be loved by the darkling things I seek. .

WHERE HAS MY SPINE GONE?

Dear Baba,

I have lost all my power and no longer recognize myself. I hide in whiskey and distract myself with men. I am limp, hollow, and disoriented. How do I restore my spirit? Where has my spine gone?

BABA YAGA:

The beaches of this earth are littered with spines , abandoned;.)but no matter how many Whiskeys you do pour on yr wave-beaten backbone, it will not erode.but remain yrs. : Go & pick it up & lash it to you, for sometimes you must be brash & fiendly to wear what is yrs, & in that violence it too will claim you.

IS INTUITION REAL?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Is intuition a thing? There are so many voices in my mind,
and they speak with a similar authority.

BABA YAGA:

Voices are ; noise, humanly noise—but what knows best in
you is not of human shape or sound but of a stranger,
Wilder beast.)Now it turns in your stomach, now it rends yr
chest. Tell the voices to shut up & listen for the growl.

HOW DO I CALL OUT MY FRIENDS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I move in a circle of friends who use their spiritual lives as badges of power and importance. I love them, but I am also tired of the grandstanding and lack of humility. How can I tell them this without making them mad or losing face in our group?

BABA YAGA:

Yr friends, as any other mortals, crave vain & foolish things. They are only wearing different garments than some. ;Knowing this, put on yr own strange garment, dark cloak of wisdom: dress for one day as a crow, & crow out what you see. Though crows are unwelcome messengers, mortals always in secret honor them for their knowings. After stating such prophecies, put on again yr usual human costume, & they will welcome you again, now with a respectful eye.



IS IT POSSIBLE TO THRIVE IN THE FACE OF CHRONIC ILLNESS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Growing up, I had an incredible amount of energy. Then, the year I turned 20, I was diagnosed with an incurable (but manageable) health problem that robbed me of my physical drive and mental clarity. I feel angry that my body has failed me in this way, I feel angry that my youth was taken from me so soon, and I feel frightened that things will only grow worse as I grow older. What should I do to feel better about my situation, to make peace with myself as I am now? Is it possible to thrive and build a happy and productive life when you have been placed under a curse?

BABA YAGA:

Yr anger is a) rightful river & yr fear-owl a worthy adversary following above. But every being is , cursed : wearing some deathly wreath. That you feel it ; round yr neck so young is a sorry tale but one in which you join the line of Seers—you see the truth stripped bare & so the wind stings the bareness with an extra fury & so you are roped strong with that fury & that sting, the curse is there for you, bared, to bow down to & harness & wear.

HOW CAN I KILL MY EGO?

Dear Baba Yaga,

The first reaction I have when I meet men is to think they find me attractive. Shame inevitably follows as I feel unwise to have such an ego. I have trouble doing anything fluently when I think people are looking at me, even though they are probably not looking. Even when no one is around, I'm plagued by thoughts of myself and delusions of how I must appear to others—somehow special in a good way, then in a bad way, and down the rabbit hole and back. There's got to be a way to just exist without constant overinflation and underinflation of my ego. Do you know how I can kill my ego?

BABA YAGA:

This rabbit can't; be killed, it lives in yr tunnels always. But the next times it does its running: you can (laugh heartfully at its smoldering tired feet and look away , go & study the Other things in yr tunnels & make them a sight to see. For the rabbit is only one of many creatures running through you, & the Others move more slowly and gracefully in their limbs.

HOW CAN I STOP BEING MY OWN WORST ENEMY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am my own worst enemy. How do I defeat my worst enemy without defeating myself?

BABA YAGA:

Enemies; are not defeated, but out-tricksied & sent upon foul paths, thorned & starving,. So is yr task. You have many selves—some ugly & defeated by and by. Send them thither where they have a-wanting to roam anyhow. Tell them there is dark treasure over the hill, & give an enchanted ball of yarn to lead them to the secret graveyard. Meantimes, leave at home the Ones you hear purring & craving what is goldly & theirs.



HOW DO I BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH MYSELF?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I seek comfort from others because I am uncomfortable with myself. How can I quiet my own head?

BABA YAGA:

Birds , nest bring one thing at) a time into the home-hole: twigglings, & soft pieces of this & that, & the shiny things that make their Eyes catch & love as they peruse the earth's sight. So must you drag back the victims of yr fancy into yr Skull-Nest; limbs of this & Thoughts of that, bones & shivering & stones—pick;pocket to borrow from others if that is yr need;; until you are looking upon a Skullhouse of yr own labor. For all of us have made ourselves partially of borrowings of blood & skin & sinew , & it: is a fool who thinks anyone's head comes furnished.



AM I UNLOVABLE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My mother and I never bonded, as she was depressed at my birth and blamed me for her terrible life. Now, people seem to sense instantly that I am unlovable. Even though I am a nice person and do no harm and even do good works to the best of my ability, no one loves me or even likes me. How can I change this?

BABA YAGA:

Your mother's curse is a tunnel under the earth. (She crawled through it, you crawl through it now, & who knows how many people before. In truth it is very old, it runs to the center of the earth. You are of ancient people, an ancient darkness, & it is not of yr doing. The dirt of yr back & hands is not yours, & it will wash off. :Look up & feel with yr hands through the soil, make your own tunnel out of the earth ; above you is light & grass & creeks, where you may wash & drink. & in yr bravery you will be seen & loved, the other creatures will know you as one who dug out of the tunnel, & you will be loved,for the tunnel you've eaten will flood with the sun of the newness of you, the you in the bright earth.

HOW DO I GET MY BODY TO WORK IN CONCERT WITH
ITSELF?

Dear Baba Yaga,

At night my body parts leave to fly off in different directions. How do I get them to work in concert with one another?

P.S. Don't bullshit me, Baba Yaga, or you'll wish you were a festering wart on the ass of an ancient hippo.

BABA YAGA:

You have not; salted yr bones with enough glory—thereas, they are but sickerly and crumble. Such nightly is yr tutelage. What the bones know::what the bones know you are as refusing to know. Seeking lies with the huntermouth. Follow the small plump beast to its cave & stick it goodly with one arrow good. Do not let it bleed. Otherwise you will be a planthead fertilized by the shit of ruined animals moaning you deep into the Death-hole.



DOES THIS ONE PHYSICAL FEATURE MAKE ME
GROTESQUE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

While I've come to mostly accept the body I was born with and use for loving, working, and playing, I can't help but feel uneasy about one physical feature. It's not quite a hunchback, but my shoulders are fleshy, and my back has a roundness below my neck. When I catch glimpses of my posture in windows or mirrors, I'm always surprised and disappointed. How can this be me? I stretch and do yoga, but I'm afraid it's not enough to keep me from growing into a grotesque old woman. What should I do?

BABA YAGA:

) All mirrors tell the wrong story . Your cloak-hem has already brushed the ink-pool that mars all of us; the marring of being not as we thought we were. I sit at my mirror daily & make loud laughter, inking my brows & lips with the mar-muck—then I step : through the glass to glimpse other Sights. You have) made a loveliness of yr body through the moving of it, & the mirror is a false confidant. Evermore, to be as I am is an honor & a magic.

HOW DO I OPEN UP?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I went through an incredibly rough couple of months recently and (mostly) managed to make it out the other side, but now I feel weirdly incapable of talking about my own life. How do I open up to people again after spending so much time alone in my crisis? What would I even share? It seems like all I have inside these days are things that are too small to be worth saying and things that are much too big to be said.

BABA YAGA:

) After a great famine, what lives inside a house is mice & shadows., & while the house is shut, nothing but scratchings & dooms do walk & dwell. But open the door & other creatures shall ; walk in & fill the rooms, & light eclipse the shadows. & truly it is to know that many houses are near empty without famine, so shame you not.

HOW DO I HELP SOMEONE WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN
UNHAPPY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I help someone who has always been unhappy?

BABA YAGA:

If you come across a poor thing in a pit , look about you & see: Is there a rope in the pit with which the poor thing can crawl up? Is there delicious nourishments in the pit? Has the poor thing watched anyone point to the sun as it rises? Has someone told the poor thing that their being is like ours, & therefore, they are known and loved? If all of these matters have been accomplished, yr help is of no use to pits and their dwellers.



I'M A TERRIBLE PERSON; WHAT NOW?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I recently realized I'm a shitty friend, an apathetic daughter, and a selfish lover. How can I change?

BABA YAGA:

Deep change is unlikely. ; But you may go out to the edge of the pond with the stars below you & the stars above you, & draw down into the ink of yrself where is the feeling, & close yr eyes & bless those who love you anyway even as you are so small. & if you do such-so nightly you will keep the knowledge of who you are, & that will be the beginning of it.



HOW DO I DEAL WITH THE UGLY VIEW OUT MY WINDOW?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Somebody has built a big house atop a nearby mesa,
prominent in my home's landscape. How can I be at peace
with this man-made monstrosity looming over the valley?

BABA YAGA:

Rare it is that a place ; is sacred-most to all, & always there
are those bumbling & unmoved ones who invade & invade &
trouble yr life & understand nothing.) But they are walking
after some song of their own, following it because the song is
sweet to them, & whether you burn this house down or
ignore it forgivingly, know this.

WHERE HAVE MY NIGHTMARES GONE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

For most of my life, my nightmare creatures were always bees and wasps. Recently, it's occurred to me that I haven't had these nightmares for years. What is that about, and why do I miss them?

BABA YAGA:

You no longer live in the world of hauntings.;The objects around you do not shift of their own accord, & all yr bones are quiet, & you know that the stinging creatures only sting for reasons that the sun can understand, . You sleep through the nights now because it is useful to do so, ; before, you did not know why the night existed, & it meant too much to you. But if you wish to be haunted again, it is because you miss the shadows of things & the shadow of you moving through them.



HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF FROM DRAMA?

Dear Baba Yaga,

A close family member has constant drama in her life. I, on the other hand, abhor drama and live a simple and stress-free life. She calls me every time there is a crisis and pours it all into my ear, hardly pausing for breath and showing no interest in my life. Afterward, I feel drenched in negative energy and have trouble shaking this dark mood. I feel a duty to be supportive, but these phone calls are very upsetting. Am I being selfish in resenting this?

BABA YAGA:

Into yr ear is being poured a black syrup from someone else's teapot. ; It is not yr teapot, but it is yr ear—you must no longer offer it to the spout. & for the other, it is a burden to carry such a pot, but why then did she mix such) dark sugars, such silt & rotted twigs into her potion? Offer her yr own brew, if you wish it, but drink no more of hers.

HOW DO I FEEL MY FEELINGS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have lived too long distancing myself from my feelings.
How do I feel them, and what do I do with them?

BABA YAGA:

Yr feelings look to you as bison in the distance—stormy, powerful, & ready to charge.)But feelings are not anything solid, to be killed or butchered & carried home. Walk toward yr bison; when you reach them, you will walk through them, as they aren't bison at all, but clouds. You will feel the hue & mist of them, & then you will be on the other side.



WHAT DO PEOPLE SEE IN MY BOREDOM?

Dear Baba Yaga,

People sometimes tell me I look upset when I'm really just bored. Do they see something in me that I am blind to?

BABA YAGA:

Boredom is like the rot in a wet stump-top: the rain, gathering in that little well, makes possible the decay the cells are given to. ,What is it in you that makes you stagnate so easily? ; Stir the dead water & watch deep.



HOW CAN I MAKE GOOD FRIENDSHIPS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I used to have a lot of women friends, though recently I've drifted from many of these friendships. The microaggressions, displays of dominance, insults, and general toxicity have really started to get me down. How do I keep forming female bonds (which can be so incredibly rewarding) and at the same time protect myself?

BABA YAGA:

Each animal is a ; ravenous little wound. All such wounds together make for a dirty, swollen crowd, & it is becoming of you to want to move beyond the mess of it. Follow not those that make the wound of you sting most, but meet those that recognize the wound within the both of you, & so are careful with you & themselves.



HAS MY HEART GONE COLD?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My older sister suffers from alcoholism and pill addiction. I have watched with horror as she has steadily ruined her life. I used to feel so bad for her, go to extremes to try and help her, and worry over her safety and well-being. In the last year, I have learned to absolve myself of any responsibility over her and to just let go. But now, I'm worried, because when I look into her eyes as she breaks down in tears in front of me, I feel almost nothing. Has my heart grown stone cold?

BABA YAGA:

Stones are made by looking at the earth too long, & having no movement to change what is seen. You : have many hearts, most of them beat as bloodily as any. It is their knowing to bow down to the sorrow of the stone among them & wish to look on less hardening happenings.

SHOULD I BE LESS SHY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

People lament my shyness as though it were a curse. They want me to open up, but I feel it can't be forced. What do I do?

BABA YAGA:

People are always wanting ; others to be a mirror, they want to look & look, they want your talking to build rooms for them in which they can live & put up yet other mirrors, they want all to be a-tangle ; they want , too much. When you take the top off yr talk is your own movement, is not the answer to any desperate face looking in.

HOW CAN I TRANSFORM TRAUMA INTO PEACE AND HOPE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How can I transform pain of severe trauma in the past into peace for the present and hope for the future?

BABA YAGA:

Each wound is living aware of itself. The living feels intensely its edges. The edges seethe to be well. ; The wellness when it comes is, then, the supreme gift ; & the wellness remembers the deep living of the wound, & so is happier than any easy health.



SHOULD I PUT OUT THE FIRE IN MY BELLY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

For most of my life, I have been quiet and passive, but in the last few years I began to identify as a fiery person. I am opinionated and impatient, quick to anger. I recognize that this is harmful to my relationships with others, but at the same time, I am proud of this fire in my belly. What do I do?

BABA YAGA;

Mortals first made fire out of Need. It was a dangerous animal ; they knew not to get too close ; & yet they gathered around it, ate from it. Everyone must be afraid of that which burns & ruins, & yet life without fire is dark & comfortless, the food one eats cold. Everyone needs yr fire. As you tend it by day & by night, you will become a master of yr flame.

WHY AM I SO MEDIOCRE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I seem to be plagued with mediocrity. I try and try, but I am never more than average. How can I break free and soar to the great heights I feel I am capable of?

BABA YAGA:

Why does each body need to ; soar? All that moves above is air, clouds, and birds. Earth, too, has its wind and water and creatures, also soil to touch & fruits to devour. Whether soaring or creeping, limbs are not so grand. The birds want what you want: to occupy their bones mightily & for long.

HOW DO I STOP EATING SWEETS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I cannot stop eating treats. No matter how hard I try, I can't keep away from cookies, cakes, sweet creams, etc. I think it is harming my love life and my teeth. Please help me and my decadent indulgence.

BABA YAGA:

Baba does not help with the foolish cravings. Baba will not carry you away from the creams on a platter, will not leave you in the middle of the forest : to be pecked at by birds. You have the platter ; you have the birds ; you have the hut where you may shut yrself and feel yr own wisdom settle around you like flies as you sweat out the sweetness&honey. No one ever will pick up yr smallest rubbish on this earth which shuts its eyes to all suffering.

HOW DO I KEEP POLITICS FROM DESTROYING MY
RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FAMILY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I keep politics from destroying my relationship with
my family?

BABA YAGA:

They are on one side of the river ; you are on the other. The
sound of the rushing keeps you from hearing one another,
so speaking is useless. But look how they dip
their cups into the river as you do, look how
they wash their haired, odorous bodies in it
as you do. : Wave sweetly to them from
across the filth&wonder by which you all
must live.



HOW DO I STOP MY GROSS HABITS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have several bad habits, including picking at scabs, pulling dark hairs from my mostly blonde head, and worrying at chapped lips so much they heal slowly. None of these require a doctor; they're just gross. How do I stop?

BABA YAGA:

In yr picking you are making little wounds & then healing them, & making them again, so that every injury & recovery is a disgust and a heroism, where you are villain and you are shaman, & this fairy tale is one you love to watch, for the soul-stirrings it looms are as pungent as any drama.) Which are the large wounds casting these shadows? Where, if anywhere, is the true injury you are trying to pick & heal? Even if there is no true wound, move yr knowings to the stage you walk on & away from the puppet show you've been playing.



DOES MY SUMMERTIME DEPRESSION HAVE TO FEEL SO
BAD?

Dear Baba Yaga,

My depression seems to act up in the summertime. I hate feeling sad and isolated when it is so lovely and warm out. I'm on medication and take care of myself; does it really have to be this hard?

BABA YAGA:

You are a dark stone & the summer sun heats you darker. As long as you are a stone, you must bear this heat & wait for the cool waters of the creek to soothe you. Every shape ; morphs, suddenly, sometime. & it is not for us to know when, & we cannot will it. One day soon you will hop from yr stone.

HOW DO I BREAK OUT OF MY HERMIT SHELL?

Dear Baba Yaga,

A year ago I moved to a new town and had to work 24/7 with no time to socialize. Now I've gotten past the hump in my career, but I seem to have forgotten how to have friends. I'm really lonely, but all I want to do is hide. How do I break out of my hermit shell?

BABA YAGA:

)) Breakage is a violence & a doing yr soft body cannot take. Why ruin the shell that protects you, that is yr home? , Rather, find in the forest a tender moss patch, one where there is water & a good feeding, where safe others sometimes go. Slip from yr shell (but keep it close)—nibble on a green thing. Look in the eye of a friendly creature. Retreat into yr shell. ; Do this every several days. It is the reaching for what is tasty that will coax you out; there must be no shattering .

HOW CAN I FORGIVE MY MOTHER?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How can I forgive my narcissistic mother?

BABA YAGA:

Yr mother wore ; a sickly hat full of black ink in its cloth.
All her life the hat's ink leaked down into her skin & brain.
; There is no telling what the world will make. It issues forth
& forth. Many wear poisoned hats & dwell in poisoned
bodies. These beings are not yrs to forgive. They are &
were. Everyone, always, is moving.



HOW DO I STOP HATING EVERYONE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I've had a rough year—I lost a parent, had one spectacularly bad breakup, and experienced the explosion of an old friendship. I still have a good life and good friends, but now I hate everyone. How do I stop?

BABA YAGA:

In every being ; now, you see their eyes as glinting black seeds, their limbs as sleeves of the dark roots & branches their bodies hold. Every creature now is a cloak over an evil plant, growing, wishing you ill or buckling from rot. Every where you look you see ; the clawing wasteland of yr nearest time. & Time, coming, will ungnarl the shapes you see.



WHY DO I CRAVE MALE ATTENTION SO MUCH?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I think I must crave male attention too much. I fear that, without it, I would feel invisible.

BABA YAGA:

When you seek others this way, you are invisible nonetheless. Yr shawl is covered in mirrors in which others admire themselves; this is why they greet you so passionately. It is good to be seen, but it is better to see. Find a being to look hard into, & you will see yrself and what is more than you.

HOW CAN I TRUST MY BODY AGAIN?

Dear Baba Yaga,

About a year and a half ago, I started having some odd health problems that no one was able to explain. I kept going to doctors who kept saying I was fine, even though I knew I wasn't. I finally saw the right specialist and got a diagnosis. I know now that what's going on is not serious, even if it is a nuisance. I should be able to breathe easy again, but every time there's an unfamiliar sensation of any sort in my body, a habitual panic returns. All the worst scenarios and what-ifs appear in an instant. How can I trust my body again?

BABA YAGA:

For years yr body was a lake you looked out on, its still water receiving sun & rain, throwing up a fish splash, offering a drifting branch,. You did not wonder at it , much. Then strange things emerged, beasts & drowned boats with ghosts still in them. The lake stormed & flooded yr hut. Even as the water is quiet again, every ripple wakes the fear in you. Yr work now is not to stop looking out into the water, but to look closer: What else is in this mystery? ;Do not trouble it by scouring, as it is not for you to see at once.

Yet, the lake has spoken to you. Keep listening.

HOW DO I STOP FEELING SO GUILTY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am oppressed by guilt. I often feel guilty that I have more than other people and when I cannot help out or always be grateful for everything I have. This emotion is so strong that it steals away the joy of little things, achieving success, relaxing, spoiling myself a little. How do I overcome this?

BABA YAGA:

You are, a morning wildflower in which the dew has bundled itself. Yr work is to keep growing & bloom in yr small bright life. You cannot change the forest even as you see the animals; tearing into each others' bodies there. You bring peace to the forest by glowing palely in yr beauty.



AM I WASTING MY KINDNESS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

People use me for my kindness and then toss me in the wastebasket. It happens often: I open myself up to people, but I always end up feeling hurt. Is it possible to be kind without expecting reciprocation? Can I share kindness without wasting it on the weeds?

BABA YAGA:

Next time, pick up the weed & inspect its microscopic eye. Does it glint desperately, weedy? Does it seem to have any interest in you besides yr holy water? A good plant will reward you with its glory. You must sharpen yr vision, tend to yr garden with a ruthless precision.

DOES MY SON STILL NEED MY HELP?

Dear Baba Yaga,

When my son was diagnosed as autistic, the doctor told me to “not expect too much.” My son has since graduated from high school with honors, completed college with a double major, and is now attending graduate school. But he has few friends and no girlfriend. Should I just leave my 23-year-old alone now, or do I need to continue helping him find happiness?

BABA YAGA:

Yr son & you were packed into a barrel and flung into years of stormy seas. The barrel has finally found land; he's burst out a strong young lad, and the past is salty bits of broken wood. Yr son stands on the shore of love, kingdom in which all mortals must fend for themselves. Don't you . go looking for another musty barrel.

HOW CAN I BE AUTHENTICALLY POSITIVE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I think I'd be happier if I weren't so cynical. But when I try to adopt a sunnier outlook, it feels disingenuous. How do I approach life positively while being true to my (darker) self?

BABA YAGA:

The sun is a miracle of heat and light. Be curious about this.
;The moon is Earth's constant companion, a shadowy thought which Earth keeps thinking—this dark body follows us eternal. But Sun is much greater, it places Earth. To be sunny is not to sew yrself a gold, cold garment.. It is to know the sun's necessity for our living. Do not fret, the moon will never leave you.

THE



FOREST PATH

DO I HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN LOVE AND CAREER?

Dear Baba Yaga,

There's a part of me that genuinely believes (and is deeply afraid) that we're only allowed one great happiness in life and that someday I'll be forced to choose between True Love and Career Glory. How do I move away from this scarcity mindset?

BABA YAGA:

Little rabbits, in winter, know only that it is snow and cold and the brilliance of the sun. Their whiskers ; can't feel the hot muck of summer. Though their lives are short, so much comes for them: many unknown morsels, tangles of fear to leap through, and death could be a failing of the heart or an owl's swooping. So who are you to know what will come in yr quick, trembling life? Even the hare outdoes you, feeling time's every lash and spooling, while you listen for the future, which has no body.



WHAT IS MISSING?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I feel like I'm forever missing something inside myself. With people, without people, wonderful job, jobless. I always feel like there's a gaping hole. What is missing?

BABA YAGA:

By rooting in the hole you make the hole wider; you scrape , its walls you open fresh soil—the earth of it smells blacker & blacker, you see the hole & the hole only, you live within it always; if you find yrself eating fruits in the good forest you remember the hole & go to look if it is still there dropping yr fruit-meat all the whiles. & if you think think think only of the hole it will become the great work & mystery of yr life, & you will die in the hole as you lived in it.

HOW CAN I SAY NO TO TV?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I received this great fellowship that's given me tons of hours to devote to my practice. Yet I end up squandering so much time on watching shows. How do I say no to this golden age of TV?

BABA YAGA:

Every body gathers ; around such a dense fire—a treasure box always flashing with lives&moods, a golden egg asking only that you crack it open, & it will birth endless beings. The egg glows in the forest, & the forest around it glows not of its own accord : it is spacious, it needs be walked through for its moods to be known, & when you meet its beings they see you as well as you see them. It is wearying, the wandering. The egg) can be rolled down the hill & hidden in a burrow; the egg can be dropped into a river. But the hill & the burrow & river will know you & stalk you even when you are not looking at them, & they will find you, & the egg will sleep in its golden shell.



HOW DO I DEAL WITH NEW CAREER STRESS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I'm in the midst of a very stressful program in a new career field. In my head I know this is where I want to be, but my body seems to think otherwise. I'm having difficulty sleeping, and it's making me feel psychotic; I'm so anxious I could vomit, and I sometimes feel I can't stay here another moment. What am I to do?

BABA YAGA:

Uncram yr brain as much as you can; for it has too many things in , there, &they clamor all. ;It is truly also that Time will uncram yr brain for you, so let the unspoolings come. In the meantimes do not hold so much every feeling in the palm of yr hand like a beating frog-heart. These are the jumpings of the world making themselves known to you & not the you-yourself. & it is not so bad to vomit every once while.



HOW CAN I LEARN PATIENCE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I want the next steps in my life to proceed, but I'm still waiting on a few things to line up. How do I learn to be patient? Is it too late to learn?

BABA YAGA:

You are blind as the worm but even the worm , knows that all he eats is soil. The soil is sometimes sweeter or drier, sometimes tinged with flower or with corpse. but always the eating and always the earth. So it is with you. Remember what your mouth already tastes:

HOW DO I GET BACK ON THE HORSE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have always considered myself relatively ambitious and a very hard worker but lately have felt my drive to succeed in my field wane precipitously. How do I get back on the horse?

BABA YAGA:

The horse is off ; eating drunken crabapples & laughing with its horse friends. You would do well to join these beasts around the fire. :For they are beasts , after all & can only do yr bidding when they've been properly nourished. See to it—that yr horse gets its rest & feasting & do not fret so much in the)meantimes, for yr being has not changed & will always wish to keep on riding.



HOW DO I BRING BACK THE MAGIC?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Growing up, the power of fantasy and fairy tales held such wonder for me. I was always an imaginative child. As I've grown up, I've sadly become more and more practical. When I was a child, my granny (my hero) would tell me never to grow up. I miss that wonder and awe that fairy tales held. Any suggestions for gathering back the magic in life?

BABA YAGA:

Wonder;is always mixed in with Fear. ;No true fairy-tale is without danger.Now your life is all islands of fear with)dried-up ocean where the wonder used to be. But begin— with yr fears, & trust that they will bring you to water if you let them,. Tell yrself yr own fairy tale, the scary&wondrous story of yr life, and the magic will be with you again, casting its shadows, worrying you back into the heart of things.)

WHERE DOES ALL THE TIME GO?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Do I spend all my free time this year planning a masquerade ball or writing essays and applying to grad school? Where does all of the time go? Is there a spell to make time slower? I already tried the whole dancing-in-the-moonlight-naked thing, but all it gave me was a terrible hangover (and, to be fair, a temporarily warped sense of time).

BABA YAGA:

)Time in Eternity is boring—suchly do I have so many mischiefs. —Chop off yr head & put it in a stew-pot; then you will have eternity to lap at, & you will sicken of the taste., Elsewise , love how the planets do their moonlight dance for you in yr pithly hundred years, & smack the moon on the rump to show it who is the Boss-woman. Never will the Boss-woman quite be you (that is my mostly occupation) but you can have the longest laugh for you have the shortest earthly being. :Goodnight & wake up earliest tomorrow for the fantasy of seizing the sunbeams.(

HOW DO I DISTINGUISH PRESTIGE FROM HAPPINESS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am afraid that I cannot distinguish what satisfies me because it is prestigious and challenging from what truly makes me happy. I haven't yet found a balance, so the former wins out every time, and I am afraid of wasting my youth on my career. The other day I found my first gray hair.

BABA YAGA:

You cannot tell the difference because, in part, they are the same thing, & because you do not yet know all the other things that make you happy. ; You must find & name yr hungriest wolves & then feed them accordingly. If yr work wolf howls louder than the others, throw him some good scraps to shut him up, then feed the second hungriest, & so on. —You . are a smart girl. Now do what you can to know yr wolves & keep them all strong, not starving.

HOW DO I DECIDE BETWEEN TWO CAREERS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I'm deciding between two careers. One would be well suited for me. But I would fit the other like a square peg in a round hole. I'm qualified for it, but to truly do it well, I would need to be unselfish and empathetic. I'm not that person yet, but I want to be—very badly. So should I squeeze myself into the round hole until my corners fall off, or should I go where I fit?

BABA YAGA:

You are not dead wood, & neither is the life you wish to move inside of. Make yrself sinewy & fluent ; & know that yr work will move with you. If you make-believe that the world is static, you will find . a forest of stumps instead of tall trees, sucking up the good sap.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I can't seem to remember what the point of all this is. For the past three years I have valiantly done what needs to be done. Done what no one else is willing to do. I have grieved and lost and given birth and adopted a goddamn puppy, and now I can't remember why I signed up for any of that. How do I wake up in the morning with a purpose that is more interesting than being a plow horse?

BABA YAGA:

Plow-horses carry out the duty given to them by some Master. ;For some-such reason, you have decided there is some other being—some Master—telling you what is to be done. & if so valiant, on whose behalf have you gone crusading? (Divine who you believe has made you such a toil-beast ; perhaps the Master is a fiction, & the field you plow used by no one.



SHOULD I BE RECKLESS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Is it ever possible to indulge a passing fancy without destroying a solid reality? Must all reckless, selfish actions have dire consequences?

BABA YAGA:

You cannot ; always , be wanting to wear a Wedding veil & not desire to lift it and see which boars do run. For that, you must count yr arrows & yr strength & the tension of yr bow. A life of , letting the bowstring go Slack is a limp & bitter one. So sweet is the boar-morsel, and truly how solid is the reality of a veil?



WILL I ALWAYS BE LET DOWN?

Dear Baba Yaga,

The thing I thought I wanted in life now leaves me hollow.
How can I find what will give my life meaning? Am I
destined to be let down no matter what?

BABA YAGA:

You are not some ; squirrel, hoarding up, filling the hollow—
you are not simply a creature going after one morsel and
then another and another until death hollows you out,
endingly. Morsels always empty. But so much more churns
in you than desire , desire : which is only one of the
movements of yr blood. The bone & flesh of you has much
to say about being.

HOW DO I KEEP THE SPARK GOING?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am so antsy always to begin, but I constantly find myself shrouded in a fog and cannot find my way. One morning I am on fire and emboldened, but the next I am lost and choking in the smoke. How do I find the quiet courage and patience to carry on when I am fumbling? How do I keep from losing the spark?

BABA YAGA:

The spark will remain its lonesome self without(kindling. & strange;thing about kindling is the paltriness of its nature, the smallness & flimsiness of it. Courage and patience are too large&loud for what you are needing. Do not ask, of yourself such feats but feed the fire with little homelies first.



WHY ARE ADULTS SO OBSESSED WITH WORK?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Why are adults so obsessed with work, and why don't we play more?

BABA YAGA:

Feeding yrself & feeding others is a serious game. ; Not every mortal survives it. But there are minutes, hours even, where the mind widens into a field, —and the sun enters in, the grass is odorous, and you are sated, no one hunts you. That's when you must grab a passing chicken & join its dance. Whether any other grown human will walk the field at this moment, too, is another matter.

HOW DO I MOVE FORWARD AFTER A BLINDING REVELATION?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Some things happened recently that cracked my conceptions of the world and myself wide open. Now I feel the push to do something about it, but I feel like I'm in a blindingly bright room and all I can see is the back of my eyelids. What's a person to do when everything is so illuminated that you can't even see where you're going?

BABA YAGA:

It is not (the room that is brightest, but yr eyes that have known only darkness. ; Waking up morningly you are sightless first, & then yr eyes grow stronger. After some stumblings, the world around you will show its terrain, & you will see what is to be done.

HOW CAN I DEAL WITH THE COMINGS AND GOINGS OF PEOPLE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How can I deal with the comings and goings of people?

BABA YAGA:

Each coming is a beautiful assault & each going a grievly one. In the pond I watch many dartings; & if I were to stand at one end I would be much bereaved. But looking from above it is not to feel sorrow, for all that moves away comes back or arrives to yet another, & movement is what freshens the water. Only when you : are smallest & stillest, with no other but a humanly eye, does each movement cause such pain.



HOW DO I COMMIT TO THE LIFE I HAVE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Sometimes I want to walk away from everyone who's ever known me and reappear somewhere new and start over. I keep thinking that maybe this next time, I could be someone better and make all the right decisions. I wouldn't have to worry about any of my current problems. I just want a clean slate and a fresh start. How do I commit to the life I have instead of the life I could have?

BABA YAGA:

)It is the same life. Within each being so much darts & so much waits to tip & spill—& it is not for the saying what will nudge the tippings. But also ; it is the truth that yr body is always containing the same organs, the workings will be the same always. Making strong movements within the current field you stand in will do as muchly as walking to another, & when the tipping comes at least it will be a field you know —& which has in truth not loathed yr being so much as you have thought.



WILL MOVING HEAL ME?

Dear Baba Yaga,

After a period of illness and homelessness, I have been living in the same place for over two glorious years. When my landlord gave me my key, I hid my tears. Recently, I decided that my inability to fully heal has been due to my dwelling, but the search for another home has been fruitless. Is my heart whispering, "What you have now was once something you dared not hope for; grow here"? Or is that just my sabotaging ego? What and where next?

BABA YAGA:

Mortals think ; the next stump will make a better seat. But soon the woods thrush with the same sounds, the wind bites as before ... Stop. the search. Stumps are stumps, and you will always be yrself among birds, beasts, sun, moon, & the river that listens to yr sorrow.

WILL MY LIFE EVER BE THIS GOOD AGAIN?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I'm in my last year of graduate school, and I've been having a great time. I haven't planned much further than this, and prospects look bleak. It seems unlikely that I'll ever stumble into a more felicitous set of circumstances. Will my life ever be this good again?

BABA YAGA:

The life ; you know now will soon seem a bauble ;—full of visions & unimaginable colorings, all a-swirl & small enough to hold in yr hand. & yr new life will feel hot & ravenous as the live mouth of a beast, & real. & then that too will be a bauble, & you will admire it. :& everything will be small & far away, & all the sadnesses, too, small & almost darling. So when you are in the mouth of the beast, let yrself be eaten, let the beast eat all of you & gnash yr bones.

HOW DO I STOP PROCRASTINATING?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I motivate myself? I find myself more and more frequently putting off my work and then later completing it in a frantic rush before the deadline or else never doing the work at all.

BABA YAGA:

The cure lies in a still & gentle part of you, long ignored, a lamb lying alone in sun and grass. The lamb goes on sunning itself , as you worry yr fingernails & rush around the forest, picking up and dropping acorns. What if ; you stepped beyond the frenzied forest & joined the warm-lit field with that sweet self which knows only to feel good? .It waits for you, always.

AM I MISTAKING ADVENTURE FOR DESTRUCTION?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I distinguish the need for adventure and change from the impulse to destroy a good thing?

BABA YAGA:

Only an ill bird wants to destroy its good nest, & ill birds shouldn't fly. Is there a sickness pooling in yr chest? ;Only you can feel that nervous black spread.



HOW DO I ABANDON MY STRIVING FOR GLORY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I've recently decided to focus on my spirituality. But I've always been driven by accumulating accolades and praise for my creative work, and fame seeking seems in fierce opposition to this kind of growing. How do I abandon my striving for glory while keeping the joy of creativity in the center of my life?

BABA YAGA:

Glory is , a bar of gold given & paraded at the market, joy is the well of gold hidden in the deep thicket of yr particular woods, where suddenly a valley opens. Of glory there is never enough, always you go hungry, it is the food of mortals for the mortal stomach. But of joy you may glut & glut, there is no end of it, it is the food you will crave once you truly taste it.

SHOULD I KEEP PUTTING MYSELF "OUT THERE"?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I recently moved to a new city without a job, a partner, or many friends. I interview for jobs by day, and I go on dates by night. I feel like I'm putting myself out there. I do whatever I can to muster up a brave, confident face, but I am not getting anywhere. I just keep getting rejections from jobs and "I'm just not that into you" conversations from men. How do I find the strength to stay open, energized, and authentic?

BABA YAGA:

You put yrself in places so as to be prodded & considered, watched & frowned at, like a piece of fruit ; trying to glow & smell sweeter than the other fruits.)Forget all the grubbly picking hands. Stay in one place & think on what you wish, & let the wishes gather around you ... & if nothing comes yet, sit with the crumbs & the rats & the sunlight that has come to you willingly, & be for a while a poor queen, but a queen nonetheless.



HOW DO I CREATE STABILITY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Ever since I quit a stressful job three years ago, I have been floating between periods of unemployment. Opportunities seem to brush past me, close enough to touch with my fingertips but dissolving quickly. After so many years of insecurity, how do I create stability?

BABA YAGA:

You have been now a long time in the deep, slow part of the river living. ;In that time strange inklings have shaped you: yr skin come transparent, little webblies between yr fingers & toes. You know what beings approach by the way the water blooms & reeks around you. ;Now the land life is strange to you, but as a frog you know both worlds & this is what makes you suited to the larger earth, & why you will survive vaster than the others. ;Put yr jellied feets on the silted banks & see the hoofed animals kneel before you.

HOW DO I GET RID OF MY WORK ETHIC?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How do I get rid of that demanding work ethic that has overtaken so many Americans? I want to enjoy a quiet afternoon of slow reading and not feel that twinge of guilt—you could be cleaning out the closet, etc.

BABA YAGA:

Inside of work is the promise of transformation: broom the closet & you will spin an egg from gold inside you—you hope that after more workings, yr whole new being will emerge from the gold. ;But some labors are too great for the little gold they spin, & after many sweepings & dustings you are clean & the egg waits. Who , knows what will trulymost crack it open? Sit in yr long afternoons & do not move: watch what the light might do to seduce a cracking, though you touch nothing.,

HOW DO I STRUCTURE MY LIFE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have an unstructured life but lots to do. Everything goes on a list; I then see the list as an oppressor, and I will avoid everything on it including things I enjoy. I have tried but failed not to make lists. Lately, I find myself longing to be back on the mountainous lonely island where life was simple. We were on holiday. My beloved dog was still alive, and it was just us and the landscape and the weather. I find myself in tears thinking about it. But my husband works in the city and we depend on his salary ...

BABA YAGA:

The little doings are birds who know not why they gather, & so scatter to find the stray seed. There is no bird mind they listen to. Why do you gather the birds? What mind-shape should they follow? There must be a living force & desire within any landscape & weather.

IS MY LIFE CHANGE A MISTAKE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am facing a significant life change. Will I find happiness, or is it a mistake?

BABA YAGA:

Wrench open; the blood jar(&inside a paradise of heads, aweberries). Woman is untamed & forlorn but once you thought you saw yourself, Birdly of Paradise. Now half in the burlap you lie with knobby feets. Speed with the godspeed & you will be good to eat. In the jar is the bloodspeck that blooms into a castle you can roam all yr days with yr Tender Babes by yr ribcage sleeping sweet.





HOW CAN I ENJOY THE MOMENT?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I've been in pursuit of a career, a boyfriend, a steady bank account, and a nice apartment in the city for years and years. Now that I'm within reach of those things, I worry that I got it wrong, that I am insatiable. How do I sit still and take pleasure in the here and now?

BABA YAGA:

Not every creature can be still. Yr running after meaty prey is what keeps you alive, & yr muscles are fine & silky with pursuit. Only, how long since you listened to yr sinews, felt the blood holding the creature of you alive? Yr claws, which have done so much hunting—how particular their gnarl, which you have long forgotten to see. Yr vision, long seeking for you, is possible through the curious globes of yr eyes. There is no here & now. There is only yr body, which listens to the earth as best it can. Listen to the wonder of that body & you will hear the earth better.

HOW DO I HELP PEOPLE WHO RESENT ME?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am a middle school teacher, and some days all I can think is that almost 30 students are focusing their frustration and even hatred at me. Then I feel like only a crazy person would do this job. Is there a mantra I can say when I start to think about how much the people I'm trying to help seem to resent me?

BABA YAGA:

These bog children, these pimply tadpoles, these ; craven storks & moaning worms, foul little simpering bullweevils, cretinous belches on the pondscum surface are at the mercy of yr great gifts & they cannot know it. Know their lowliness is inner&outer, & if yr compassion rushes in to wash over their dearth, let it—if not, they will grow despite themselves, & because of you, & you are the Queen of the bog, you a brave deity descending into the swamp, & yr white robe shields & protects you, no matter the muck.

SHOULD I MOVE TO A NEW CITY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Sometimes I feel like I want a different world than everyone wants. When I look around I don't see many reasons to be happy. Should I move to a new city?

BABA YAGA:

, Think on the feast you want to devour. Whichly fruits & meats & berries, whichly cakes & potions? :Scrounge to find the delicacies, sate yrself, & only then think of others & cities.



HOW DO I GET OVER MY TERRIBLE BOSS?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I had a terrible boss at my last job. Even though I don't work there anymore, I still get annoyed and angry when I think of her. How do I get over it?

BABA YAGA:

See in yr mind this woman on a ship. With her are all the terrible things she made you do & which you felt ; she is surrounded by chests of drawers, & in every drawer there is the junk of yr knowings of her, strange doorknobs, unseemly pieces of paperscroll, ugly jewels. She is out there alone with this garbage, & she is frightened; the ship is not well made, it is rotten somehow, & she knows it will sink. Now you feel sad for her. & yes, the ship does sink; a storm comes & the ship is ruined, & all the trash & all the woman goes down into the sea & drowns. Now you are almost weeping for this creature. But her death is peaceful in the final moments, & she settles at the bottom of the sea; the baubles of yr old hate settle into the sand around her. The sea & fishlies bare her to the bones; and the baubles say nothing. & all is silent and clean. & you are on land & safe, & yr mind is like the wind over the sea, feeling nothing,

washing everything.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MOTHER?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I just gave birth to a beautiful boy. I love him and am happy to be his mother, but I struggle with what motherhood means in our culture. By turns I feel frumpy, out of shape and touch, sexless, looked down on, pitied, and, worst of all, patronized. I'm tired of the tacit assumption that my life is over because I've had a child. Men don't have that problem. The worst part is I feel my identity as a mother could, and should, be a great source of strength and pride. Do you have any wise words I can remember the next time I encounter pastel everything or flagrant sexism or stupid Internet mommy wars?

BABA YAGA:

You have made a creature.

You have made a creature.

You have made a creature.

I know of no happening more strange, mysterious, witchly, frightful, powerful, magical. You are one to fear & admire.

MY LIFE HAS A HOLE IN ITS CENTER; HOW DO I GO ON?

Dear Baba Yaga,

Several months ago, I gave birth to a child who didn't live for very long. My partner and I have been supporting each other through the waves of grief, but there is a large part of me that wants to set my life on fire and get far away from everyone who ever knew I wanted a child. How do I stay attached to my life when there is a hole in its center that can never be mended?

BABA YAGA:

Everywhere you go ; you will wake up next to the hole, fall asleep with it watching you. Burning down yr trees will only leave the land more barren, so that the hole looks larger. Fire or no, the land will keep pushing out new beings. It hurts to hear the forest growing as the hole stares into you. But it is the sound & vision left to you, here & elsewhere.

HOW DO I BECOME LESS FEARFUL ABOUT MONEY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am so fearful about work and money. Please help.

BABA YAGA:

Each forager is a question mark ; tail dipped always in the River of Hunger. The river is endless & loud, and if you listen too hard you'll drown. Look where you are for your berries & fish, then go to sleep.



HOW DO I DEAL WITH MY GROUCHY COWORKER?

Dear Baba Yaga,

One of my colleagues has no real perception of how his negative and grouchy tone can affect his coworkers. I find him to be an incredibly inspirational person to work with; if his awareness of people's feelings were anything like his dedication to his convictions, people would have an easier time with him. How do my colleagues and I work with him, both admiring him and despising his behavior?

BABA YAGA:

You love the bear's beauty but hate his claws. Not every beast is tender, especially if there is genius in his making. Do as every mortal does around the Wild Ones: know the bear's wandering & doings, know the range he needs, which meats. If certain of you is a Wild One too, then the two beasts should wrangle for strength. But it is of no use to pretend that some aren't elk or rabbits, made for the tremor & dash, and some aren't the heaving boulders we quiet around.



CAN GENERATIONS BE RECONCILED?

Dear Baba Yaga,

What can be done about the disdain that older and younger generations hold for one another?

BABA YAGA:

In the golden apples orchard, one firebird dozes in a tree. She's got there early & eaten her fill. . Another firebird arrives hungry, she lives in a dream of apples: each is enormous, she burns only for apples. Sated Firebird thinks Hungry Firebird foolish, messily pecking—& Hungry one smirks; What is life but apples? ,Only the orchard is free of disdain. It knows the ripening & withering of its fruit, and the forever fussing of firebirds in its enchantment.

HOW DO I MAKE THE MOST OF MY FREE TIME?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I have a few months before I start a very demanding program that will probably take up the next decade of my life. I have no idea what to do with my remaining time. Everyone I meet tells me to make the most of it or enjoy it while it lasts, etc. I've decided to spend some of it abroad (and in fact am writing from abroad right now), but, to be honest, my life here feels just as unenchanted as my life at home. How do I deal with the pressure to make these last few months mean something?

BABA YAGA:

There is no pleasure ; in the waiting ever, the waiting is a long thread the grand Crone of time pulls through yr body, holding the needle on the other side of you, winking, thinking.) This worry crawls up yr bed now when you want it least, & will not stop until the thread passes through & this New Time that you are barreling toward, this New Time that seems as the maw of a prison, will in truth be the place in which you are free to move ; it is the now, in the barrel of yr hot last hours, which is prisonest.

HOW DO I PUT MORE PRESSURE ON MYSELF?

Dear Baba Yaga,

How can I put more pressure on myself? I really want to create something, but since I started working in an office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. last year, I can't bring myself to do anything but watch TV and sleep.

BABA YAGA:

Pressure only creates movement ; whether for good or ill is not the pressure's knowing. Make yr creation something that is found rather than unleashed: look for it daily like a strange button or seed lost in the tall grass , a snail or a root. Not like the restrained water that floods the banks & loses the button, the seed, the snail, the root in its forceful liberty.



WHERE SHOULD I PUT MY ENERGY?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I am blessed with many interests, talents, and desires. They pull me in different directions, thereby ensuring that movement is forever lateral and never forward. How do I determine which of these fires to stoke?

BABA YAGA:

Whether or not you may say so, there is always ; one fire louder than the others, more consuming., Who knows why—maybe the twigs it devours are aged best, maybe the wind is stillest around it. It is not for you to think on. Let this fire get too ; big. Let it threaten the forest. Let it eat the other fires around it, until they are living in it. You will see ; abandonment of yr smaller flames is not needed to grow yr wildest, most dangerous one.

HOW CAN I MAKE PEACE WITH DEATH?

Dear Baba Yaga,

I find myself fixated on fear of my death lately. It isn't nonexistence itself that scares me; I fear facing my end staring into a countdown clock that is running low. I don't want this to get in the way of experiencing my life. How can I make peace with the coming of my cessation?

BABA YAGA:

Always ; yr eyes shift to the clock while the bread is baking. How dark it is in the oven, & fragrant is yr house. You put yr hands in yr face & you breathe in deep, & you look out the window. The bread will be done soonly, so soon, & what will it taste like when you eat it all? In yr heart & lungs is the coming of it, is the ticking of the clock. & why should it be otherwise, should you walk from yr house & let the bread burn?

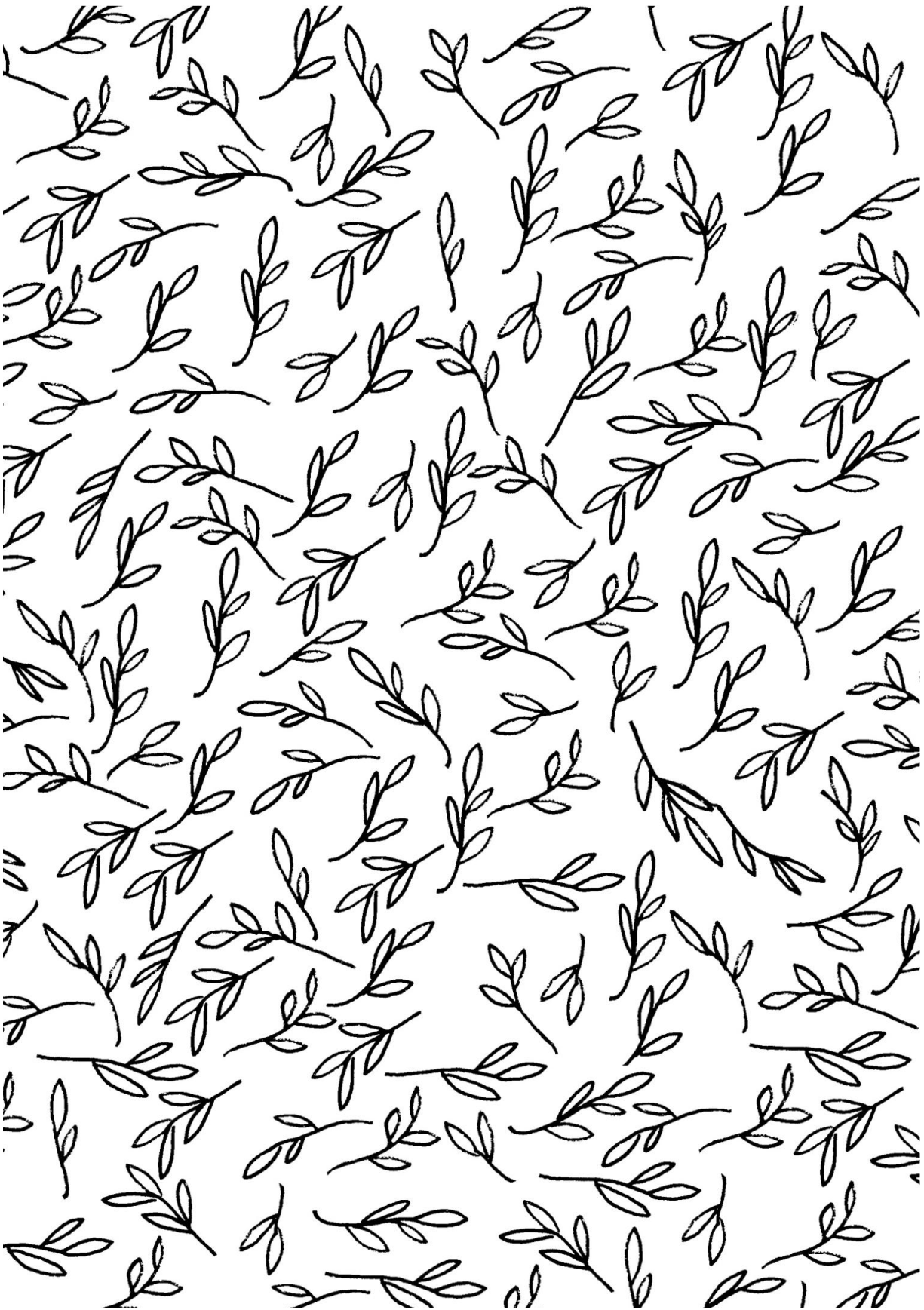
WHAT IF EVERYTHING I'VE EVER WANTED COMES TRUE?

Dear Baba Yaga,

What happens if everything I've ever wanted comes true?

BABA YAGA:

Then—the part of you that's never wanted will sit alone, & be very quiet at first, & small. & You will be despondent, & cast about for more things to want. ;Don't. Tremendous luck : has brought you to the place you should've lived in all this while. ,Let the small(one be yr largest dweller, & guide you through the barren landscape that has been yrself, & which you must now populate with the real things.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Taisia Kitaiskaia was born in Russia and raised in America. She is the author of *Literary Witches: A Celebration of Magical Women Writers*, illustrated by Katy Horan. Her poetry has been published widely. Baba Yaga lives deep in a treacherous wood; Taisia lives in Austin, Texas.

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