Broody Yaga
&
The Wheel of Shadows

by Amy England
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BROODY YAGA

&

THE WHEEL OF SHADOWS

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY

AMY ENGLAND

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ROCKS

The rocks of Ubar behave in some familiar ways: they are the basis for mountains, they can be hurled as missiles with injurious effect, they can be shaped into units of building matter; they are black when they are not other colors. Taxonomically, they are more closely related to the sponge family. Textures range from pumice to doeskin.
ASTROLOGICAL TYPES

sweet maroon lamp: swarthy feverish tyrant
salty indigo abacus: pallid verbose scholar
bitter blue potted plant: florid artful heretic
sour peach souvenir thermometer: sallow valorous bureaucrat
spicy brown spatula: freckled languid purist
salt lavender oven: pale elegant virago
sour yellow kettle: sallow virginal vagabond
sweet green broom: dark high-principled hedonist
salt grey block of tea: pale wealthy lout
bitter red plastic recorder: red-faced slothful sentimentalist
Etc.
Overheated yucca tea may produce scalded birds, and is therefore automatically considered animal cruelty. While this is not officially illegal, the Friends of Scalded Birds Society has its own effective means of punishment for over-heaters of tea, involving lacing the turban cloth with alum, or bending the foot jewelry to produce headache-inducing visions of orange and green sparks.

Adulterous cries: If a bird flies into an open window, and no outside witnesses are nearby to attest to it, the inhabitant or inhabitants will smother the bird with cushions rather than allowing it to escape, lest neighbors attribute the bird to voiced (i.e., fricative) immoral passions.
HBQ/EAM duets: When a male voice of haunting banjo quality joins in song with a female voice of erotic accordion mesmerism, a white ibis is a likely result. Unlike most cases of bird generation, organizers of public gatherings do not avoid, but cultivate this possibility—even though occasions of generated ibises have not, historically speaking, been particularly fortuitous. At the heresiarch’s inauguration of aught three, it is said, a duet-induced ibis’s sudden appearance so startled the Grand Lizardess’s husbands that they collectively fell off the dais and into a vat of overheated yucca tea. All were scarred for life—a just punishment supernaturally supplied, according to the doctrine of the Friends of Scalded Birds, for the husbands themselves had insisted on the tea’s excessive temperature. Perhaps the confounding of these narrative elements—the screams of the Great Lizards amid the steeping pointy leaves—led to the false attribution of ornithological potential to the shrieking yucca (see).
THE WHEEL OF SHADOWS

A wheel whose spokes are intersecting figure eights, shadowed with pegs that are topped with eyes painted inauspiciously open or auspiciously shut—what does it reveal to us? First, the two types of infinity—the finite infinite and the infinite infinite, knotted time and plumed time. Second, the months in which it is wise to set forth, sit down, sail off, see more, stay home, store figs, stuff the ballot box, strew pebbles, stew leeks, and stoop to folly, and the months in which it is not.

Thirdly, the wheel delineates for us the shape of a year. This year might consist of the familiar three hundred and sixty-five days, but how oddly they are disposed of. Each of the twenty-two months \((\text{digits})\) lasts sixteen point six days, or \(\text{ribs}\), completely unbroken by weeks, let alone weekends. Each day is named for an ordinary object (key, bowl of rocks). Only the partial day, at the month’s end, is a nameless, unspeakable time—the rest is all thoroughly accounted for. (The new month following this partial day

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begins thus fourteen hours and twenty four minutes, or three limbs, later than the last month). Picture it: sixteen interminable days, the day's five hours/limbs horribly wrenched from the places that one only just became accustomed to them holding, all leading up to that fourteen-and-a-half hour black-out of shuffling and desperate reorientation. No wonder Ubarians require that up to ten elevenths of their year be spent in vacation.
Horoscopes are based on the month, day, and hour. Twenty-two months, sixteen (namable) days, and five hours means that there are 2,260 individual possible horoscopes, requiring column inches far in excess of the surface area of the Daily Pyramid. Most must content themselves with the vague and generally unhelpful hour- or limb-based horoscope—for example:

*Spicy:* You will travel, then travel again.

This is quite misleading when read against the specific horoscopes in the spicy group, for example:

*Spicy black bowl of rocks:* Your hands will resemble starfish and blue crabs will traverse your knees as you stare sprawling at the bottom of the wine light sea.

So how does one acquire one’s specific, helpful horoscope? My friends, people are the same everywhere. Money, sexual favors, black market souvenirs—so obvious, so uninteresting.
Here we call an astronomer an astrologer by mistake and then profusely apologize. Not so in Ubar, where only astrologers have real telescopes. An astronomer must make do with a cardboard tube and a convincing expression of frowning authority. But the astrologer’s telescope! First of all, it is very, very long, like the Washington Monument. Second, it bristles and festoons itself with excrescences of gears and pulleys and dials and meters, most having no function except to delight the heart. And third, it is intensely decorated with pictures of naked people. Religious subjects are favored; the figures are always naked.

A typical subject of religious claymation might be the presentation of the holy headdress to the first heresiarch before his extended family and the multitudes. The same subject might be depicted on the telescope, except that the multitudes are naked, likewise the sisters and cousins and aunts, likewise the heresiarch (grey and lined of face but robust of body), likewise the heavenly messengers, whose
genitals have pages like books do. As if to rifle those pages, the astrologer's hands pass gracefully over the scene as she or he adjusts the telescope to exactly the right position, using a wrist-worn positioning device (not a device on the telescope, for I told you that those don't work). This done, the world-weary lens inspector steps up and does his bit, and then, then, the viewing of stars.

Why view the stars? To check the accuracy of the calendar. Is this necessary? No. The calendar is very accurate, and doesn't need adjustment more than once in a thousand years. But a great part of the mystique of astrology rests in the setting of the cold silver of that carefully positioned, fully inspected eyepiece to the eye, like setting a coin to the eye of a corpse, amid a riot of nudity. Most astrologers insist on traveling through this grandiose ritual every night. Would you forgo it?
BROODY YAGA IN HIS UNIFORM

And how weary he is, despite the glamor of the uniform. Today it is lentils, red ones. To the farmers, to the counters at the processing pit, to the shopkeepers, to the lentil consumers themselves, he exists only to impede the carrying on of daily life. And yet thousands of people and llamas die of irregularly shaped lentils every year, as everyone cheerfully acknowledges. A pit worker offers him a bowl of lentil tapanade; he shudders and declines.
Yesterday he felt a fluttering in his own throat as she opened her mouth and cried out a rustling, quick-departing finch. He saw the note she was making actually take on feathers and eyes, the ah the wings, the oh the belly, his name the orange-red bill. Never in all his life had he caused such an event before.

Today he sits at his usual place at the stone table, polished to a high velvet sheen, in which is embedded fossilized nutmeg. He had been giving the report on the weekly lentil index a certain sardonic attention. But a finch flies by the window, and his concentration comes unmoored, veers off after it.

Tonight, although he would prefer not to, he is committed to attending the underwater ballet.
-THE TREACHEROUS WIFE-

Uthor: (Throwing down his zither) I have gone and come.

Ginger: Gone and come (licking his nose). Was the session successful?

Uthor: Not so very. That pallid weasel my cousin had to leave early. Strides into the living room, stops suddenly.

In a terrible voice: What do my eyes behold?

Ginger: What?

Uthor: A melon seed on each window sill.

Ginger: Don’t they look nice?

Uthor: On my way home, my treacherous wife, do you know what I did, out of love for you and the generosity of my bowels?

Ginger: What?

Uthor: I stopped at the astrologer’s and purchased your horoscope... and do you know what it said?

Ginger: What?

Uthor: (reads) “A melon seed on each window sill will prevent the incoming sound of foghorns from...
engendering melancholy in the ears of you and your household.” Who did you blow in the back alley to acquire this information?

Ginger: There was no back alley, husband.

Uthor: In the street, then?

Ginger: There was no blowing whatsoever. Sit down and I will tell you all. Do you not remember that this is the Rib of Spatula, the day of the company bonus?

Uthor: And?

Ginger: I had the choice of an extra year’s ration of camel tokens, or a pair of horoscopes—and I chose the latter!

Uthor: Do you mean?

Ginger: Yes, I have your horoscope right here. (Licking his nose repeatedly) Now don’t you feel foolish?

Uthor: Darling!

And together they begin to read.

Translator’s note: The underwater ballet does not, of course, have dialogue per se. Instead, a highly evolved system of

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gestures takes the place of spoken lines—gestures I have necessarily been liberal in interpreting. For example, I have translated as *my treacherous wife* the moment in which Uthor rips Ginger's left flipper off her foot, suggesting that she will now be physically marked for life as an adulteress. However, the audience also understands the allusion to the shoe fetish motif, hinting at the possibility that the husband will later enshrine the flipper in secret and mourn the beauty-of-their-love-that-is-no-more for the rest of his tortured life.

What no spoken translation can gracefully incorporate is the pointing. Throughout the the play, both characters keep one hand pointing continuously at the note-in-a-vial collection on the end table. The audience understands that the wife has in fact treacherously sold the collection and replaced it with an exact replica, thus acquiring the necessary funds to purchase the horoscopes. This is known as irony, and it makes the audience sneeze—which is why scholars refer to the underwater ballet as "Ubarian snuff."
THE SECRET LIFE OF BROODY YAGA

There's the odd lenticular uranium deposit or bowl of daal, but mostly he works at night, carrying his micrometer case and cleaning putty from one astrologer's observatory to another. Enough to make a cynic of anyone, all that pompous vanity, those exaggerated gestures copied from the aqua ballet, those gaudy turbans. And all that time he spends with telescopes weakens his resistance to other faults as well. There is a certain maker of bifocals—he's been in her cabinet a time or two. He is ashamed about this, him with a fine wife and husband at home; there's an orgy of some sort almost every night if he's interested. But after the endless parade of depicted prophets and saints, and the constant barrage of neatly fulfilled predictions (the astrologers often slip him a free horoscope), he feels a powerful need to get away with something. It is not that this particular order of things, he thinks, fails to satisfy him, but that order itself is unsatisfying.

He knows that this discontent implies revolutionary responsibilities. He should be secretly knocking lenses
askew, filling out reports with advertising slogans, fouling the lines of cause and effect. But he will have time for those things later. Sufficiently absorbing it is for now that he can superimpose over any of the tedious day’s events an image of the maker of bifocals in the midst of her bird-producing ecstasy.

Tonight the third astrologer he attends hands him a bit of paper. So you think you’re getting away with something, it says. Broody Yaga folds the paper and wonders where to put it (no pockets in Ubar), feeling ill.

(And what are the bifocal maker’s secret thoughts? That Broody Yaga once resembled the angel who alternately guards and burns the book of fate. He floated above everything. Now she watches his face become intent, waiting for ecstasy and birds; she feels the wind of him falling. In between times, he regains his detachment, but only partly, and less and less each time, so that now, when he steps out of the cabinet, she can see that he is a little afraid of her. She loves this weakness, loves being the cause of it. It was a perfect thing, and I broke it, she thinks. This type of exultation, a subcategory of Corrupt
Distraction, is common as dust, punishable by means of broken crockery and illustrated skin.)

(Note on the Cabinet:
Does it seem curious to you that a cabinet should be the setting for all this venality? Why not a dresser of infinite drawers, for example, or an ocean of square holes in the ground? Surely the reason lies in the well known, if unacknowledged, place of origin that the cabinet holds in the personal history of nearly all Ubarians. Only the cabinet resonates so well with the mythic concept of generation of matter infinitely sustained. And only the cabinet adequately invokes the deity that presides over all festivals of accumulation: Bursk, the bull-headed hermaphrodite whose abdominal door opens to reveal yellow leaves falling into a pond, whose cranial door opens between horns to reveal the constellation of Cygnus, whose knee doors open to reveal twin bowls of beer fermenting in a shaded corner.)

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PUNISHMENTS FOR ADULTERY

How do we detect adulterous guilt? — In ways too numerous to mention; through dreams of fish in shoals swimming one way, then another; through aversions to certain foods or smells, i.e., vinegar, damp sand; through a comma-shaped crease that punctuates the forehead, signifying “and then...”; but most of all, through ylügen, an extreme of distraction, an abject removal of attention, the likes of which no virtuous person would ever be tempted to commit.

How long does the sentence last? — Two months, ten days, six hours, and twelve minutes.

Is any adulterer exempt? — The cabinet provides a measure of legal protection.

Who are the famous adulterers? — Besides the Thirteenth Lizardess, we treasure the salutary examples of the Fine
Astrologer of Bunnee and the collective squid tenders of Tlön.

What makes Ubar susceptible to this scourge of infamy? —The raindrops, when they do fall, have a slight but noticeable positive electrical charge. And telescopes.

Common punishments are listed below (the most painful and practical punishment to be chosen by a jury of three bee keepers, the Grand Lizardess, and a potted cactus):

1. The Head Bruised and Covered with Bees (the head banging dance—see: Gifts of Apology)

2. His Eyes Look Odd but at First You Aren’t Sure Why (shaved eyelashes, also the eyeball tattoos may be sanded off)

3. Exile from the Laws of Chance (“No Theater”)
4. The Llama Grows a Hump (forced change of loyalties from the llama to the camel contingent, or vice versa)

5. Strangled by Boa Vines (forced service as small animal champion in game of giant terrarium)

6. Bittersalt (assigned to horoscopically incompatible camel driver)
THE UBARIAN SOUVENIR CACHE

Scholars had long suspected the existence of a group of Ubarian vacation souvenirs in private collection. In April of 1989, in a Kansas City savings and loan forced to close its doors due to wildly inappropriate investiture of funds, a staff member discovered this remarkable group of artifacts while dusting out the safety deposit boxes. The leasee, a certain Giles Hollowpole, travel agent, suffered an unfortunately mortal wound during questioning, and so these priceless objects were given to be housed at the Denver branch of the Ubarian Scholarship Society, where they now reside. The major objects from the cache are catalogued below.
John Cotton Div: OUTER WRAPPINGS.

Dyed crepe-like fabric of inorganic composition. The cache was contained in this cloth, a sort of triangular *furoshiki*, the pattern reminiscent of the type of uniform worn by inspectors of lenses and things of lens-like shape.
Cotton Mather I: BEACH GLASS FROM THE GLASS BEACH.

Located south of the capital city along the shores of the wine light sea, this beach is one of the more popular tourist destinations. The rich stay at the pollen spas and perhaps never get to the beach itself, but a number of reasonable establishments stand within sight of the frosted white shingle and within hearing of the crunching waters.
Increase Cotton Dmvi: STEREOSCOPIC VIEW OF ORANGE TREES.

Few who travel to the Glass Beach fail to take in Florida, the off-shore eel refuge, famous for its underwater orange trees. Rowing out to the refuge and snatching floating oranges from the snipping jaws of ravenous eels is a popular family pastime.
Increase Mather Xix: POSTCARD.

The postcard does not name the original owner of these souvenirs, being merely addressed to a room number at the not very prestigious Hotel Fruit. We have translated the message as follows: "Esteemed colleague, hope the [indecipherable] are proving restorative. Have you cheated the eels yet? As you may gather from my card, I still keep up with my hobby of harmonious cactus enhancement. Work on the latest primer goes swimmingly, so well that I must now laugh at my earlier efforts—'auspicious chicken,' indeed! Guard your souvenirs carefully! Yours in these as in all matters, Ganesh."
Cotton Cotton Oxxl: WICKER BRACELET.

This object enables the wearer to subtly make the statement, “I have just been on vacation.” A returned vacationer typically wears such a bracelet with great nonchalance, as if too recently returned to think to remove it. Given the average Ubarian may spend anywhere from ten to twenty of the year’s twenty-two digits on vacation, it is strange that vacationing is such cause for display. Nevertheless, this display often lasts for almost the entire inter-vacation period, until ridicule of the wearer’s pretension inspires its removal. The bracelets are cheaply made, only meant to be worn for a few hours, and a person who has recently removed one is made conspicuous by a wrist garlanded with red sores.
Vertigo Cotton Vli: MESSAGE IN A VIAL.

The ultimate proof of poetic accomplishment is the note in the vial, written on vacation for the ostensible purpose of flinging it out to sea. Needless to say, very little real flinging takes place. Our vacationer has kept his vial to take home and exhibit, probably on a stand with a collection of vials from other watering holes. This somewhat cliched example can be transcribed thus: "O islanders, I am marooned on a mainland. Although I know you will not come in your roughly carved boats that move us to tears, at least know there is one who longs for your reaches of the map; let my envy sweeten your already idyllic days."

The selections in this chapbook are from *The Books of Ubar*, a collaborative work of fiction written with Rikki Ducornet and Catherine Kasper.
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This is number 6.

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