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(from) Dreamlife of Honey

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Marcus Slease

(from) The Dreamlife of Honey

As a teenager, you were baptised for the dead, at one of the church's 159 temples around the world, you wore your white gown, waded into the baptismal font resting on the statues of 12 oxen, after each short prayer, you were dunked in the water, 75 times for 75 names in 5 minutes, you were proud of it, the number of times they dunked you in the water, pushing the lungs to the limit, the names of the dead, rattling off one then another, the name and then the dunking, 75 names, it was more than Chad or Brad or Brock, 75, you were dunked so many times and you could take it, pushing your body, dunked 75 times with the names of the dead, you listened to each name and date before getting dunked, then later they handed out the names, they were the dead from the 19th century, so many names, they had to keep dunking, the dunking offered the spirits in the spirit waiting room the opportunity to accept the true gospel, that's what they told you, they could maybe become gods in the top level kingdom, baptism for the dead was the ultimate opportunity, you could keep progressing long even after you were dead and buried, yes baptism for the dead was the ultimate honour, there on a Saturday with the other 12 year olds, new in America, 12 years old, dunked over and over to rescue the dead.

There was a controversy with Jewish names, some from the Holocaust, baptized by proxy, hundreds of thousands in the 90s, this brought to mind Jews being forced in the past to convert to Christianity or face death or deportation, said Jewish genealogist Gary Mokotoff, in 1995, after the controversy, and discussion with Mokotoff, the church authorities banned baptisms of Jews from the Holocaust, except when they are ancestors of Mormons, there have been more controversies, over the years, with celebrities and public figures, Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe and the Queen Mother, the grandparents of Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Hillary Clinton, Steven Spielberg, the ancestors of Kim Kardashian, Carrie Fisher, Joe Biden and John McCain, all baptised, baptism for the dead was for everyone, in 2012, the researcher Helen Radkey, a former Mormon who left the church in the 1970s, discovered the baptism of Anne Frank by proxy, the church authorities implemented a firewall and three full time staffers to watch the database for the unauthorised baptism of the dead by proxy, the church authorities are sent a list of Holocaust victims each month by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, those names are off-limits, if you no longer want your registration as Mormon, you have to write a threatening letter, but what kind of letter can you write when you are dead.

There was a controversy of Non-Mormons becoming Mormon in the next life without their consent, but the church leaders said it was a service, they could choose to accept or reject their baptism by proxy, in the next existence, in the waiting room, not a forced conversion, they could choose the truth and the light, or reject it, you and your chum wanted your names purged from the records, even if someday, when you were dead, someone in the line of your Mormon families put it back there, is there any way to escape the registry?

After Weber State University, you moved to Bellingham, Washington, strumming Bob Dylan on your guitar, attending graduate school, studying language theories, the signifier and signified, writing avant garde poetry, with a flatmate and cat named Simon who always spilled the bong water, you listened to Modest Mouse while reading *A Picture of Dorian Gray* at a bohemian cafe, in Bellingham, you were remaking yourself into something different, dancing to live Blues, drinking craft beers, walking the great arboretum, so far from your former Mormon life in Utah, & one weekend Andy drove his car to White Rock, in British Columbia, & you snapped back the schnapps at a German bar, listening to the world's languages on the promenade, especially French and German, since you were both learning them, the world on the promenade, you had moved away from Utah, hurtling yourself into heathenism.

I've found a couch, said Andy, we'll have more room to sit, & behold you took the couch up the stairs, it will not fit through the door, said Andy, we could saw it in half, you said, & so you procured a saw, from the neighbor, proceeded to saw, but halfway through, with a small mountain of saw dust and ripped cloth below you, you realized you were destroying the couch, if you managed to saw the couch in half, and it fit through the door, it would be a ruined couch, it might not hold any weight upon it, so you stopped sawing, before it was too late, acquired a pulley, pulled it through the window.

After Bellingham, Andy moved to Cambridge, for a degree in art history, and then Prague to teach English at a university, & you followed Andy next door to Poland, a few years later, after acquiring a divorce and leaving the United States forever, you were both pilgrims looking for new holies made from old holies in the Slavic lands far from your birth countries, your throat was tickled by fur hats in Poland, but there were very few fur hats in Poland, the fur hats were probably Russian, your throat was tickled by German and Polish, the holy Slavic shrines with harsh hills and mountain stew, you were full of cabbage, stewing.

You were in Katowice, Andy in Prague, & you decided to meet in the middle, the wonders of nature in the Slovak Republic, on New Year's Eve, walking the high Tatras in an oversized puffy jacket, and then into Levoca, or maybe Kezmarok, a small historic village, charming modern tried and true, Andy had a romantic partner and you had a romantic partner, you all counted to one hundred in various languages, your partner counted in Polish, you counted in German, Andy counted in French, Andy's partner counted in Czech, & when your ears were sufficiently tickled, you turned on the clock radio, for every song from the Rolling Stones, you downed a shot and acted out a knife fight, there were six songs and six knife fights, after the sixth time, you looked at the clock, it was close to midnight, we better go out there to the square, said Andy's partner, before we miss the fireworks, we should paint our faces, you said, & the faces were painted, the hair gelled, in the square the people gathered, trailing their children, dancing in circles with sparklers, you remembered sparklers, the smell and feel of them, how your step father lit them in Milton Keynes, England & you danced with them, wrote your names in the air before immigrating to America, the magic of sparklers, in the small square the countdown ended & there was a small display of fireworks, Andy with painted face and gelled hair, the fireworks popping colors into the night sky, it was 2007.

You have moved on, but now, in middle age, you are looking back, for so long you tried to hide it, your spirituality, religion is the wound that wounded you, it was everything and you divorced yourself from it, your intellect and curiosity collided with dogma, half way through your Mormon mission, at age 20, you returned home early to small town Utah, you didn't want to be American, but wanted to re-find your lost origins, from Ireland, your birth country, you wore a Celtic Cross, attended Catholic mass, wanted to change your name to Marcus McGuthrie, and then eventually, at university, minoring in Philosophy, rejected religion & turned to Secular Humanism, it was all temporary.

You hid away in your room for comfort, you can't rely on anybody, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you hid away from people & cried in the evenings, alone in your room, isn't that a sappy story, when no one was looking you cried in your room into the plush chair, & one day your mother caught you, overwhelmed herself, no money, the collectors calling, father on a drunken bender, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you were crying there, in your room, face pushed into the plush, thinking you were crying for everyone, seeing their faces and crying, the sufferings of everyone, since you were told you were a good friend of Jesus, maybe even a best one, & sometimes you even thought you were the new Jesus, reincarnated, meant to live forever, since you had no broken bones in your body, always following the ghost & warm heart of Jesus, & there you were, crying for

everybody, but really you were crying to cry, that was one way to do it, cry for everybody, what is anybody really.

He wouldn't hurt a fly, they said, pointing at you, always the peacekeeper, but not now, you have splattered three flies in the faculty room, and soon the fourth, you have hurt many flies, you think, picking up the book about Anne Frank to splat the flies, but flies carry diseases, you learned it early, there in your mother's house chasing the flies, checking your stools for colour and texture, consistency and length, breadth and width, no green, yellow, orange, clay-coloured, or bright red, and there was the tube, to clean yourself out, the tube with your name on it, but you hardly ever used it, your mum with the vitamins, checking the nutrition, always concerned with it, maybe partially a product of childhood poverty, and you look at the stools now, especially in Austria, where there was a little shelf in the toilet for you to examine it, unlike in America where you plop it and forget it, the most water of any toilet belongs to the Americans, no one wants to see it, the stools samples below you, yes, you think, I have hurt many flies, you think, but only for good reason, but it is also a pleasure, splatting those flies with the only book available, a biography of Anne Frank, here in the faculty room, your plague mask securely fastened, above the tennis courts at the high school in Barcelona where you teach, listening to the grunts of the high school tennis players, ball thwacked from one side of the court to another, heart and will power, it has taken you 25 years and many countries to say it, an ex-Mormon, not a Non, your Mormonism has mutated, you no longer genuflect in the mornings and evenings beside your bed with fingers interlaced tightly together feeling the warmth and tingles in your body, waiting for the holy spirit to enter you, in general, you are non-genuflecting, although you might genuflect with other gestures, you don't wear the sacred garments, shake the secret handshakes, whisper your secret name, you carry a slew of identities, you do not believe any of it, the still small voice, the tingles and bosom burning, but you still search for it, through the altered states of art and language, a spirituality, leaving one country for another and another and another and another and another and another, where do you come from is a question you receive in every new country, you have moved on, but you have to look back to move forward, you come from this and that and you are still becoming, isn't that the glory.

The trees are made of jello and tremble with god wind, all that animal energy, not to mention the various greetings, there in the trees, trilling and musical patterns, there are so many ways of greeting, large cats rubs their heads & bodies together, yes the rubbing is a kind of stroking, elephants entwine their trunks, giraffes press their necks together, horses rub noses, penguins tap their bills together, lobsters squirt urine on each other, the urine of the dominant lobster carries a message, it says I'm the boss, and dogs rolls over when

a large powerful dog approaches them, this avoids conflicts, but you have leaned left, the social construction of reality, even trying to flatten the hierarchies, but they are still with us, up there in the heavens for the religious, trickling down here to earth, a kind of ladder, the great chain of being, for example, god at the top, descending through angels, humans, animals and plants to minerals, but there is something suspect about that, you think, humans as the culmination of creation, dominion and powers that have led to our possible extinction, you think, but what is the alternative when you take god out of the picture, evolution mirrors it, the great chain of being, the process is progressive, from lower to higher life forms, maybe it is built into us, and also other animals, hierarchies upon hierarchies, how did we come to question them, step outside of them, rather than just accept them, what does this say about us, you think, we are part of nature but are trying to create a new nature, the new nature of human culture, but the new nature mirrors the old nature, there are always power structures, there is no way to flatten them, & back in England the hierarchies were still raging, the kings and queens and fairy tale royalty, lords on horses, foxes and hounds, black hats, long coats, those were the masters above you, while your stepfather played butcher with his brother in the garage in Manchester & you ate everything, pig's brain on toast, blood sausages, my blood to your blood, the blood balls rolling inside you, royals and more royals, how could so many people love them.

Your head and heart are a kind of hierarchy, but that's silly, In olden days, according to tradition, eggs were bad for the liver, also the heart, depending at least in part on how you do it, the head & the heart have been around forever, in the east the seat of consciousness is in the chest, the heart, but in the west it's the head, I'd like it to be here, you say, tapping your chest, but I think I'm here, you say, tapping your temples, does thinking make life better, have you seen Rodin's Thinker, squatting, his fist on his chin, constipated, books upon books upon books, a tower of babel, information moves faster and faster, have you heard about the turtle, turtle in German is toad plus shield, a turtle is a good toad, it moves slowly, you want to move slowly, pick up the beer by the giant handle, smell the sausages.

Frank lived in Prague, he was German and could show you the small town in Bavaria, it was something you always dreamed of, taking the midnight train from Katowice to Prague then Prague to Regensburg, your first taste of Germany, behold the most ancient sausage stall in history, not to mention the large German beer halls, ancient mugs for ancient people, look at this bridge, said Frank, it's got a backwards gargoyle, it was maybe your first gargoyle & you identified with it, those gargoyles inside you, since you had left the Mormon religion, and also America, you saw those gargoyles everywhere, for example the masturbating gargoyles in Valencia, was this your power animal, the gargoyle is hideous but also beautiful, the gargoyle was the original gutter, 13th century French architecture,

but then they became chaotic evil, gargoyles, you can say it over and over, rain sprouts but also fantastic creatures, “what is the meaning of these unclean monkeys, these strange, savage lions and monsters? To what purpose are here placed these creatures, half beast, half man or these spotted tigers? I see several bodies with one head and several heads with one body. Here is a quadruped with a serpent's head; there a fish with a quadruped's head; then again an animal: half horse, half goat... Surely, if we do not blush for such absurdities,” said Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, do the gargoyles ward off evil spirits, riding the train from Regensberg to Prague, there in the small compartment, you sang the songs of lederhosen, drank from the horn of plenty, dreaming of your ancient ancestry.

Your ancestors were farmers, brought over from Scotland in the 17th century, others French Huguenots, tilling the earth or cultivating the gardens for rich Anglo-Irish, & your first reading was *Farmers Weekly*, the magic of *Farmers Weekly*, there in the lorry with your granda, collecting the milk from the farmers around Northern Ireland, reading, or rather looking at the *Farmers Weekly*, that yellow on the cover, turning the pages and counting the numbers of livestock, you and your granda, and when you stopped at the farms he collected the milk, scooped some in the palm of his hands and let you drink some, the creamy milk straight from the cow in the palm of his hand, and back into the lorry reading *Farmers Weekly*, the news of the soil since 1934, the magic of turning those pages with your granda, thinking someday yes that is what you would become, the farmer like so many before you, or maybe a gardener like your great-granda, or your biological father, but then later you learned differently, no good with your hands you needed to use your mind, and now here on the telly there is a documentary about private space flights, for rich tourists, up there in the space, & when the space metals fall to the flat earth, the farmers saddle their mules and drag it behind them, the sheep bleating in the distance, the farmer dismantle it, piece by piece, kebab stew in a space bucket, over a campfire, later the expensive material is sold to China, for brute survival, then sold back to the west for foil to wrap sandwiches, & that’s how it goes, you think, more and more pyramids with the rich at the top and the farmers beneath them, in way or another, once you were born into something it was hard to break out of it, but there in America you were not a farmer, or a factory worker, somehow you had escaped it all to become a high school teacher, & before that at the poverty line till your mid-40s, but living simply, not tied to any land or country.

When the news of virus descended upon you, you were in Castelldefels, just outside Barcelona, & at the local bakery the croissants were crabs with buttery pincers, we’ve got the breath of death down our necks, you said to Pineapple, the news louder & louder,

gripping and pulling, the virus, sweeping across China, already in Europe & America, it's not a question of if but when, said the newscaster, freedom versus order, freedom versus order, you hear it over and over, the walls are crumbling, but new walls are going higher, there is no moral high ground for us to stand on, wars and rumours of wars, the Russian invasion, more and more on the horizon, the new rise of fascism, the lust in my hair, the lust in my shoes, you think, breathing breathing, says Laraaji, who are these hyenas hijacking the system, breathing breathing, says Laraaji, plucking your eyebrows, plucking your nose hairs, pincers make us beautiful, you thought, biting into the buttery croissant, and on news from Japan there was dark humour, in order to prevent the spread of the virus, the Tokyo funpack advises people to scream in their hearts, rather than from their lungs, while riding the roller coaster, it said, and you thought yes, screaming into your heart is better than screaming into your lungs, there is so much to scream but it is better to scream silently, virus or no virus, riding the world's roller coaster, scream into your heart because that is where it all starts, there in the heart, the centre of everything, and then you went out there, with the virus raging but less raging, and the children were allowed on the playground at their appointed hour, and you sat on the beach, trying to breathe in the fresh air, while a little girl came closer, she was talking to someone but you didn't know them, maybe a babysitter or sister, I know what grown-ups do, said the little girl, they get into bed naked and then they wind each other up, and you thought yes, that happens, she is not wrong about that, you thought, but not always, it is interesting to observe patterns and the best patterns are observed from outside of them, like a child, you thought, there is a world between the child and the adult but we still need to bridge it, you thought, so much of childhood makes us but we try to forget it, you thought, slowly slowly, you thought, thrift and moderation over agitation and haste, and then in the evening, there in Castelldefels with the virus raging you hung your head, flopped around the dance floor of the living room, this little box of shadows with the light flung out of it, a panther shadows my lyrical shadow, you thought, but I have to keep dancing, there in the living room with the virus raging, and then later venturing out there with Pineapple in search of the bird of paradise, slipping on your plague mask, shoes squeaking on spilled lagers, endless throngs of scooters, you were out there searching for the bird of paradise to liven up your living room, the bird of paradise prefers full sun to partial shade, up to 25 feet tall, a poisonous flower, the banana leaves feel tropical, out there to bring back the bird of paradise for your living room.

During the time of the plague, approaching the lift in your building after work, an elderly man approached you, plague mask slipping under his nose, and this disconcerted you, trying to avoid the plague and this elderly man before you, breathing out through his

nostrils, but he was very excited and it was hard to move around him, muttering something about plants, you tried to understand his Spanish, si, you said, over and over, trying to listen carefully, where do you live, he asked, atico, you said, yes, he said, many people have lived there, Germans, lots of Germans, also French, Russian, and even English, but most importantly the koala, he said, you searched your limited vocabulary, is it the same in Spanish, koala, you repeat, si Kola, he says, showing you a baby koala with his hands, one hand moving toward the ceiling, the other hand toward the ground to show you the koala growing, koala you repeat over and over, then you say goodbye to him, you were not sure if the German or Russian or French or English had a koala, or maybe the koala lived in the atico alone, maybe I am the koala, you thought, some kind of exotic animal, there in Castelldefels so far from friends of family, in the time of the plague.

Living near Carrer de l'Església, in Castelldefels, a long street with generic tapas, but one good Japanese and one good Andalusian, says Pineapple, and now there is El Super Burrito, 5.50 for the fat burrito, good on occasion, but not too often, says Pineapple, it is not the Mediterranean diet, I don't want to return to my London face, says Pineapple, my London face was stuffed with chips, yes, you say, me either, my London face bloated with ales, and you both agree to not eat too many El Super Burritos, stick mostly to olives, & the fruit of the sea, something close to the Mediterranean diet, even though El Super Burrito is some kind of comfort, still in the midst of the pandemic, you wanted something to ease the pain, isn't it something always, giving yourself a little of this or that, there is nothing steady to stand on, even if you think you are on solid ground, something shift beneath you, death there in front of you, you never know when it will pounce, and there in the early morning they're back again, at 4AM or 5AM, they chose their hour carefully, how do they know, buzzing around, waiting for the right time to suck the neck or hand or back or elbow, then they sneak away, & you can't find them, the stealthy hunters, how do they know the timing, when you are asleep and snoring, they come when you are the most defenseless, how to prepare for anything.

The ground is shaky underneath you, how to prepare for anything, your step father was laid off, he was often laid off, even when he had his own air conditioning company, Cool Valley Air, he was often laid off, there in Vegas, & also in London, when you lived in the homeless hostel, have you been laid off, how often have you been laid off, would you like to get laid off, you lay down to get laid off, but you can also stand up, or sit up, there are many ways to get laid off, while your step father was laid off you escaped into the world of ninjas, there in North Las Vegas at the talent show, where you performed a flying sidekick, then threw a Chinese star & it was deflected by a block of wood hidden up your

partner's sleeve, you escaped into the world of ninjas, also Wilderness Survival Camp, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, but you wet your socks, & you had only one pair of socks, body heat prevents hypothermia, said your step father, climbing naked into the sleeping bag with you, a bar of chocolate for energy, you learned the lean-to, & also the igloo, you learned the knots and weaving, the helicopter circled around you, cooking potatoes in ashes, crunching the carrots, boiling the big pot of crayfish, you have to be ready for anything, fear is built on repetition and the Mormons had taught you the end days were upon you, you have to be ready for anything with the one year's supply of food storage, chosen and elected for the latter days, the apocalypse always in front of you.