



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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## Episode #21: Letting Yourself Off the Hook

*Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.*

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan. This is another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I have been trying to figure it out of late by reading my future in tea leaves. And then Marty came in and brewed up a cup of her mysterious chaga tea. And then boom. She had it figured out just like that.
- Martha Beck: Well, yeah, because chaga is what makes you figure it out. It's a mushroom from Siberia and I don't really know how to describe what I figured out, but I will tell you, it is in Siberia. It is under the snow. I think with those parameters, it should be simple for anyone to figure it all out.
- Rowan Mangan: Especially as Siberia melts, it'll be more accessible to all of us.
- Martha Beck: You just had to a harsh my mellow didn't you?
- Rowan Mangan: Sorry. I'm sorry.
- Martha Beck: I was on my chaga high and now I'm like wa wa wa. Seriously, what are you really trying to figure out, Rowan?
- Rowan Mangan: So what I'm trying to figure out is how to not tell our brilliant daughter that she's brilliant-
- Martha Beck: And why would you do that?



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- Rowan Mangan: Funny, you should ask. This is for why, because in the current wisdom of parenting, what they have found is that if you... We do want to compliment her, we do compliment her all the time. But what you want to do is compliment the effort and the trying hard, rather than complimenting the child for being inherently smart. Because what they say is I tried to figure out where I read this and I couldn't find it. But they do say, I guarantee it, that if you tell a kid that they are smart, when things get difficult, they'll lose all sense of self because they're supposed to just be smart and just know how to do it. But if what they've learned is that trying more and more gets you there, then they won't have that crisis ahead of them. So that's-
- Martha Beck: That's fantastic. I'm so glad that you tried so hard to learn that.
- Rowan Mangan: Thank you. I did try really hard.
- Martha Beck: Do you feel empowered? Just now?
- Rowan Mangan: Very much so, but what has happened with Lila... So I read this, I love reading books about this sort of thing and we have to do this. But what happens is we keep second guessing ourselves and panicking any time we compliment her, which led Marty the other day to say, and I quote, because I wrote it down. Lila did something and Marty goes, "Oh my God, you're fabulous." And then immediately does her panic face and then goes, "I'm not going to say why." And that was...
- Martha Beck: I think this is in some middle ground where you just grow up completely demented and unsure of everything.
- Rowan Mangan: Just so confused. So anyway, there you have it. Compliments.
- Martha Beck: Well, we shall see how this is working. Won't we?
- Rowan Mangan: I guess so. What are you trying to figure out Marty?
- Martha Beck: Well, what I'm trying to figure out in all seriousness is why I can't get ASMR to work for me.
- Rowan Mangan: ASMR right?
- Martha Beck: A-S-M-R it means autonomous sensory median response. And I didn't even know it had a name. I only knew that when I was in middle school, I had a geography teacher with a sonorous and mellow voice and everything made-



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Rowan Mangan: Did you feel funny feelings?

Martha Beck: It did, but not the way you think. Every time I went into his class and he started to talk, I would feel this lovely tingly sensation. I said, sexation, oh my God.

Rowan Mangan: That's because I was looking at you with one eyebrow raised.

Martha Beck: He was not attractive to me, but his voice caused a tingling in the back of my neck.

Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah.

Martha Beck: And I was a really good student in the other classes. I was a total horrible nerd student. And I would sit up eagerly looking at the teacher, but I would go into that class, put my face-

Rowan Mangan: Roll the floor and go, "Ah"

Martha Beck: Yes. I'd put my face right on the desk to begin with. I never even pretended to pay attention, I would just... And then he would start to talk and I would just lie there on my desk going, "Woo." Only to find out late in the winter of my life that this is called ASMR, autonomous sensory median response. And a lot of people have it and they put things on the internet that are meant to trigger it because it feels delicious.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I know about this.

Martha Beck: Have you had it?

Rowan Mangan: I feel like I have the gland for it-

Martha Beck: Just the gland?

Rowan Mangan: The gene, the gland, the propensity. But just a teeny tiny bit enough to know what you're talking about, but never... I started hearing about this years ago because it's all... And there's this funny, fine line with it between, is this a sexual thing or isn't it? And I know it's not. But it's always about someone speaking right in your ear.

Martha Beck: Yes. And doing all the things they tell you not to with microphones like, pa pa pa. And so our producer is just losing his mind. So I was like, "Oh my God, I could get my middle school, neck tingles back?" I'm totally logging onto the internet, I'm going to do it. And there's just a ton of ASMR.



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Rowan Mangan: Sorry. I just have to say.

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: Getting my middle school, neck tingles back - a memoir.

Martha Beck: As opposed to naked tingles. Now I really wanted this feeling back. So I went in and I was somewhat disturbed by the content because the sound of somebody wrapping a package is a major trigger for a lot of people.

Rowan Mangan: You mean a positive trigger.

Martha Beck: Yes. Yeah. Sorry. They're listed as triggers, which is confusing. Because mostly triggers are bad. This is a trigger for something very good. But then you go in and there's one woman who does... kudos to her. She's amazing for many people. She does this whole gig where she pretends to be a very quiet package wrapping lady. And she says things like, "Come on in. I will wrap those packages for you twice, twice, twice."

Rowan Mangan: It's like so weird. Because it's like the beginning of a porn movie where it's like, "Come on in, I'm going to wrap some packages for you." And then she just proceeds to wrap a package.

Martha Beck: Just wraps packages and she's like, "I'm going to wrap it." They do it in a really high, sweet voice, "I'm going to wrap it once, for a present. And then again, I'll post it for you." I'm not even kidding. And I listen to it, it does nothing for me. I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to do this at night when everyone else is asleep." I get my phone. I look up ASMR triggers. I lie down on my pillow and right behind my neck, I put my phone and it's so-

Rowan Mangan: Do you really?

Martha Beck: Yes. So I can get me ASMR and I wait. And the woman's wrapping packages like a weird soft porn lady. And I'm like nothing, flat beer.

Rowan Mangan: It's like the softest porn ever.

Martha Beck: Super soft porn. Goopy porn.

Rowan Mangan: Oh.



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- Martha Beck: Oh. Okay. So then I'm desperately searching the internet and there was one that it promised big things. The reviews were stellar and it worked for me one time. And let me tell you what it was. It's so funny. Talk about where we draw the line because it was an Australian.
- Rowan Mangan: Uh oh.
- Martha Beck: Right there. He's got my attention, but he's a he so that... less attention. But no offense to all our male listeners. It's just on the pillow. So then he starts talking and he says things like, "I'm going to take you in your imagination, to Bondi beach." And I was like, "Oh, woo. I'm feeling the ASMR." So then I fall asleep and he's... And then like 3:00 in the morning I wake up and there's a man whispering in my ear. "Sun is so warm. I'm on the beach, welcome to Bondi Beach. There's backpackers bloody everywhere. Everyone's a poem over here at Bondi Beach." Woo, I'm getting the tingles. No, but like it worked one time. And then the second time when I woke up and didn't know what was going on, I was so frightened. It totally ruined the effect.
- Rowan Mangan: I just need, before we move on in any direction you to just clarify what you mean when you say it worked.
- Martha Beck: I got the tingles. All up and down my neck and into my skull as well.
- Rowan Mangan: Really?
- Martha Beck: Oh. And it's the most delicious sensation. It's like a massage.
- Rowan Mangan: Huh.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. A very G-rated massage on Bondi Beach.
- Rowan Mangan: We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a little favor to ask. Would you consider giving us a little rate and review love on your favorite podcast player? It helps people find the podcast. It builds this beautiful community. Most of all, it helps us in our quest to bewilder the world. Thank you so much.



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As you know, Marty, and as our listeners know, this podcast is all about helping people from a state of bewilderment into beWILDerment, which is our own true nature. And so let's figure out what is culture and what is nature when it comes to letting ourselves off the hook. And what I think is interesting with this topic, Marty, maybe with all our topics is that you can't just say the culture, even though we do, because the truth is that it's always a different culture. Every culture has hooks and it's to the extent that we believe the culture that we're stuck on the hook-

Martha Beck: That is such a good point. And it's funny how the social pressure can cause you to just pick up a hook you've never had before. Like when I was in Japan, where it's so taboo to go into a house with your shoes on that burglars take their shoes off before they burgle a house and the police just go and take their shoes away and they can't go outside without shoes, as you just don't do it.

Rowan Mangan: What a brilliant system.

Martha Beck: It's the perfect way to prevent burglary. But I came back from Japan to America and would try to walk into someone's house with my shoes on and freak out. I had to get that hook out.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Oh my God. I had the same thing living in Thailand where it's incredibly rude to blow your nose in public. I don't know if I've talked about this on the podcast before, and so I got this like intense secrecy and squirrelliness whenever I had to blow my nose, even when I was back in Australia. And I would look around and sneak off with a tissue to do secret things in corners.

Martha Beck: Oh, you naughty woman. I had the opposite when I went off to college. I won't say where.

Rowan Mangan: No need.

Martha Beck: Listen to any episode, you'll hear it. But I was 17. I'd grown up Mormon, no coffee, no alcohol. And those hooks were in there. So the first time someone offered to buy me a cup of coffee, I literally turned and ran away. I was terrified that someone would force me to drink coffee and the hook was still hard in my mouth.

Rowan Mangan: And it's interesting because you went from the Mormon capital of the world to the college life is basically all about coffee and alcohol.

Martha Beck: Coffee and alcohol. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: It was that's the culture.



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- Martha Beck: I didn't know what to do.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. We were thinking about like, okay, so what cultures are there? Family cultures and national cultures and all of that sort of thing. And I was thinking about, "So what can I... What is it hard to let myself off the hook for, in my family"? And I was thinking, one of the things that we value a lot in my family is cooking and bringing... so if there was a family event, I would find it very hard to let myself off the hook for bringing something that I'd cooked myself.
- Martha Beck: And so you have to bring something, you cooked yourself?
- Rowan Mangan: It's not that you have to.
- Martha Beck: This explains so much because we're all sitting around scratching ourselves in this house and Ro will say, "I am so sorry, I didn't cook dinner." And we're like, "Why should you cook it?" But now you're telling me that's your family cultural hook.
- Rowan Mangan: It's hard to let myself off the hook for cooking.
- Martha Beck: Wow.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And it's hard for me to let myself off the hook for writing. My father was a professor. He was always working on a book and yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And so the rule is we can let ourselves off the hook as long as it's the hooks that our culture sees as unimportant. Yeah. You were giving yourself a hard time for not getting the writing done. And I was, "Wow. I would have no trouble letting myself off the hook for that, with everything else that we have going on, if I were you." But you said, "I had a really, really hard time letting myself off the hook."
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And especially for writing, because it's the hardest thing. And I have told myself that is the core of everything I do. And I must. And I realized we have different places where we keep ourselves on various hooks and it depends on our socialization and what we have come to believe. And then I said to you, "What does even this even mean? Which hook, what are we talking about?"
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And all I could think of... It gets a bit grizzly here, but all I could think of were butcher's hooks. And it felt very violent and it is very... Look, butchery is a violent profession.





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- Martha Beck: No offense, butchers.
- Rowan Mangan: They know.
- Martha Beck: Okay. He didn't know it.
- Rowan Mangan: So in the end, we had to Google it.
- Martha Beck: We Googled it.
- Rowan Mangan: We asked the divine Google and the divine Google did say it was all about fishing. And we said, "Of course Google, how could we have been such fools? It's so obvious now."
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And so we are all like fish hooked by our lip to different types of things. Like I am hooked to writing in a way that when I try to let myself off the hook, I swear to God, I feel like I'm tearing my face off. But I still want to do it.
- Rowan Mangan: Also a violent image.
- Martha Beck: Yes. That's the thing, there's a lot of violence when you start putting yourself on hooks.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And it's so funny because there can't actually be... Okay, I'm going pretty deep into the metaphor here, but there can't actually be a barb on that writing hook or I wouldn't find it so easy to let myself off. So the barb is where we're hooked by the culture.
- Martha Beck: Very good. The culture barb on the fish hook on your tasks, this is completely clear to everyone. No, but you're absolutely right and different... "We get differentially hooked by different things depending on our socialized fears. Because if we were going with our nature and we're trying to get away from culture and back to nature, everything would be equally easy to let ourselves off the hook for," she said. Ending the sentence with a proposition. So we're sitting around talking about the feeling of the hooks and how we get pulled and snagged. And I was reminded of a book by Pema Chodron who is a Tibetan Buddhist nun. And she actually writes this whole book around a feeling or a sensation called shenpa, which I guess in Tibetan Buddhism means the feeling of a hook in your skin.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. So you're sitting meditating and you're calm and then something hooks you and you're not calm anymore.





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- Rowan Mangan: I know that-
- Martha Beck: So the whole idea from that book is you get yourself off all the hooks. And I was like, "Okay." When we first had this discussion, I was, "Yeah. Let's let ourselves off all the hooks." And then I was like, "But oh my God, if I let myself off all these hooks, I won't get anything done ever. I will do absolutely nothing. I will atrophy in all my muscles for I will never move." I really thought if I'm not on some kind of a hook, there's nothing to hold me up. There's nothing to motivate me. There's nothing to make me do absolutely anything. And so I will not. I will simply cease to exist or something. I was living by the feeling of the hooks.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow. Yeah. I think often we're on so many cultural hooks that we don't even realize that we could be motivated by anything else.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Or we start to think of the hook itself as safety or as security.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. It's the thing that's pulling us along through our lives. If we don't have the hooks, "Oh no." And every culture supports that. If you don't have the threat of punishment, if you don't have the sting of that mental thing saying, "Believe us and do what we want you to." If you don't have that, you will go to complete disaster. You will be outcast. When I left the Mormon church, someone literally came to my door and said, "They will find your bloated body in a gutter."
- Rowan Mangan: And it will have a fish hook in its lips.
- Martha Beck: Absolutely. No she-
- Rowan Mangan: Sorry, I shouldn't make jokes about your death threats.
- Martha Beck: She was genuinely worried about me not having all the hooks of that religion. She genuinely thought I would just... Not only would I go to hell, that's a done deal, but... Yeah. Look at the way I'm living now. But she literally thought my life would end in tragedy within weeks.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Wow. And it didn't.
- Martha Beck: Not so far. Let's see. That was 20 years ago. It could happen any minute. But yeah it's like, if I don't have my hook in my flesh, my kids will die. I'll just let them die.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I'll be homeless. I won't work. That's a big one.



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- Martha Beck: Yes. I won't work at all. I won't do anything.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. That's it. Now it's so interesting that... And the visual of the hook really works as well because you start to feel it as the hooks are progress, the hooks are momentum. You're being pulled through the river of your own life by the hooks of culture.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Thank you hook. It's making me move.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And it's your momentum, it's your dependability. It's your consistency. It's what makes you show up.
- Martha Beck: And then you find yourself on 20 million hooks, all pulling different directions and you kind of go-
- Rowan Mangan: "Why am I so unhappy?"
- Martha Beck: Yeah. You get to the place we got to when we decided to make this episode. Like, "I don't even know how to cope anymore." When I have a question I can't answer, I go and I sit by myself and I watch my mind clear and then I watch the pictures that come up and it's interesting. It's like this little world that happens inside. And I sat down with this question and I immediately saw a river and a murky figure with a big fishing pole. And I was this fish on this hook. And I saw that I was biting the hook as hard as I could saying, "Please don't let me go."
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God. That's so interesting.
- Martha Beck: Because I'd been so conditioned to believe that the fish and the line and the fishermen were the one thing supporting me. And I actually had the thought, "If I let go of this hook, what will support me?" And then I swear to God, it was like, I felt myself drenched in water. I felt like I was suddenly splashed into cold water. And then I felt myself lifted and the sentence came into my mind, "The river will support me."
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God. Wow.
- Martha Beck: It was very powerful.
- Rowan Mangan: I love that. It's powerful just hearing about it. So we think it's the hook supporting us and it's the river.
- Martha Beck: It's always the river. Yeah. And we talked about this after I had my little vision. About what are the times when we've let ourselves off the hook and the river did lift us, but we just didn't notice because we're socialized to only look at the hook and never at the river?



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Right. And I do think that getting away from people always makes it easier to... The hook is less powerful as you get away from all the people reinforcing it. And so I think for us, often it was when we spent enough time... Even the pandemic, spending enough time in our own little weird world, it got easier and easier to trust the river.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Well, and we were living on this ranch in the mountains, away from people and stopped being so culturally shaped. I don't think you and I would be together making this podcast right now if we'd been listening to the cultural hooks.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: We were just away and not everybody has the opportunity to get away to the world-
- Rowan Mangan: Geographically?
- Martha Beck: But I just went in the other room, sat down and cleared my mind and things start to come in to support you. So-
- Rowan Mangan: Well, culture is people. Culture is language. These are the places where culture kind of lives. Isn't it?
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: It lives in words and it lives in people. So if you can't get away from people, you poor thing. And if you can't get away... Well you can get away from language. That's what I'm trying to say. Sit quietly. There we go.
- Martha Beck: But it's interesting because one thing that really stands out to me about a time you let yourself off the hook, you went to Ireland, what on a grant to write a novel? Or were you just doing a doctorate and you were going to write this Irish based novel. Yeah?
- Rowan Mangan: That's right. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. So you went off and you wrote this highly literary novel, but at the same time you wrote a daily blog post. And your blog post was hilarious. And had me just like riveted. So I read the novel and it was very, very intelligent-
- Rowan Mangan: Dreary-
- Martha Beck: No, it's very intelligent and very literary.



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Rowan Mangan: Serious, dense.

Martha Beck: And then I read what you wrote on the blog post when you were off the hook and it was funny and it was lively and it was full of animals and images and it was your personality. And I just went here and said, "I love your writing skill. I see how hard you're trying, you're fabulous. You're trying very hard."

Rowan Mangan: Sorry. I just have to give context to that because that is one of the funniest lines that has entered our... Do you mind if we press pause on the story for a second because-

Martha Beck: Go for it. This is hilarious.

Rowan Mangan: We had-

Martha Beck: Especially in light of the whole, how to socialize your child thing.

Rowan Mangan: No kidding. So we had our friend, Liz staying with us when we were at the ranch and she said her stomach was upset or something. And she was like, "Do you just have any..." Noodles and butter is what she wanted. And we were both... Marty and I were both following a ketogenic diet. And what I had was this fake pasta made out of some kind of Japanese mushroom.

Martha Beck: It's fungus.

Rowan Mangan: Always mushroom.

Martha Beck: Back to the fungus. I'm telling you, it's the root of everything.

Rowan Mangan: So I said to her, "It's not exactly like pasta, but it's been seven years since I ate pasta. So it's probably... My memory is that it's pretty close." And do you remember what she said when I-

Martha Beck: She took two bites of this fungus pasta and she said, "Ro, I love you very much. And I see how hard you tried to make me something palatable." And then she threw up.

Rowan Mangan: She said, "I won't be eating it. But thank you."

Martha Beck: Anyway-

Rowan Mangan: Anyway, sorry, sorry.



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- Martha Beck: No. Back to the whole point, which is, you were trying very hard on the novel. You were on the hook for literary fiction. You were in the academe and all that. And then you just wrote a blog post to unwind, let yourself off the hook. And what happened is that the river took you.
- Rowan Mangan: That's right.
- Martha Beck: And then when you rewrote the novel in the voice of the blog post, that's the novel that got you an agent and-
- Rowan Mangan: And that's right. And that's such a great example because the hook in that case was absolutely the academic world, which has such a nasty hook a lot of the time. And there's that sense of trying to be impressive, for me anyway. There was sense of being serious and respectable and impressive. And that was not the river.
- Martha Beck: It's never the thing. So when you feel the hook, when you feel the hook in your jaw, when you feel it on your skin, when you feel shenpa, it feels as if nothing else will support you but the hook. But if you let go... What I'd really like to challenge our listeners to do is remember or look in your life or in yourself for a place where you feel on the hook and you feel like letting yourself off the hook would be terrifying. And then you don't have to do it, but remember a time and this'll be harder because you will not have paid much attention to it, because you're not socialized to pay attention to this. But remember a time you let yourself off the hook and you just were goofing off or whatever. And you felt something pick you up and support you and things got easier and things flowed and you connected with people and you made things because it was your true nature.
- Rowan Mangan: And I think as we learn to recognize that it's a hook, that it's culture, the more we can name it and see it, it loses its power every time. And it's so much easier to let ourselves off as we know what we are dealing with.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. So when you feel the hook, find the river that's the message of the day. And as always stay wild-
- Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word 'WILD' to 570-873-0144. For more of us, Martha's on Instagram, themarthabeck. She's on Facebook, The Martha Beck, and she's on Twitter, marthabeck. Her website is, MarthaBeck.com. And me, I too am on Instagram. Rowan\_Mangan. I'm on Facebook as Rowan Mangan. And I'm on Twitter as RowanMangan. Bewildered is produced by Scott Forster with support from the brilliant team at MBI.