



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #35: Helping Too Hard

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. And this is another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. Tell me, Marty, what are you trying to figure out this week?
- Martha Beck: I am trying to figure out what to do with our half-Zeus baby as she grows.
- Rowan Mangan: Right, yeah.
- Martha Beck: I've said previously that we believe that the sperm donor for Row's IVF procedure was Zeus.
- Rowan Mangan: A lot of people think that having a baby that's half God is going to be all awesome all the time, but it comes with challenges, and people don't realize.
- Martha Beck: It's right. You're absolutely right. They're always, I don't know, firing up a forge in the basement. Yeah, bashing down pillars. It's not easy.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So, yeah, her superhuman strength is becoming a huge issue as she approaches two years old. When she was five months old, she could still drag Adam around the house, helpless in her grip. And now she's two and I've been trying to buff up to cope with her. Seriously, I've been getting physical therapy and then I lift weights like a maniac to try to build my strength up. We have a little home gym, and she follows me in there. And I'm doing these things for physical therapy that are called kettlebell exercises. Have you seen these things?



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- Rowan Mangan: I have now.
- Martha Beck: They're like weird little suitcases, like a really heavy block of metal with a handle on it.
- Rowan Mangan: They look like something that you shouldn't pick up if it's going to be heavy. They don't look like they're aerodynamic or good for your back.
- Martha Beck: No, they don't look good.
- Rowan Mangan: No, they don't.
- Martha Beck: No. They come from, I have heard, from the dark days of Soviet repression in Russia. And apparently they invented these to make people feel worse, which is, I don't know, sorry for all our Russian friends out there. I'm sure that you're just a jolly, jolly bunch. That's not true. I went to school in Singapore with a bunch of Russians who had to have a Soviet Communist minder there, watching them learn Chinese, so that they wouldn't learn anything that was against the party. And they were not a happy people.
- Rowan Mangan: There's a complicated backstory to it.
- Martha Beck: They would bring vodka. They would get drunk. They would sing songs in Russian. And we would all, our only common language was Chinese, so it was very strange. Anyway. More about that someday.
- Rowan Mangan: No doubt.
- Martha Beck: It was a fun experience.
- Rowan Mangan: So anyway, back to the baby.
- Martha Beck: Kettlebells, the baby. So what you do with a kettlebell, it's like you're trying to lift an incredibly heavy bucket of despair. And so what I'm supposed to do is get one of these kettlebells between my legs, not the way you think.
- Rowan Mangan: Hello.
- Martha Beck: On the floor with my legs to either side. Yeah?
- Rowan Mangan: All right. Okay.



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- Martha Beck: And then you squat, low, you squat very low. You grab the kettle bell by its weird little handle, and you slowly, in a controlled fashion, you stand up from your deep squat as you lift the bucket of despair over your head. And then you slowly come down again. So I'm doing this with like 15 pounds and it's killing me. And Lila comes in and she sees the five pounder, which I can barely lift myself. So she goes over there and they're very imitative at this stage, young demigods. So she grabs the five pounder, she squats down, she comes up from a deep squat lifting that thing, and she flings her arms up over her head with such force, I am not kidding you, that she flies into the air and goes backwards like five feet and lands head first with the kettlebell still over her head, and the most startled expression I've ever seen on a human being. And I'm like, "That's because you're half Zeus. I can't lift that thing. You managed to not only lift it, but make it make you fly." And now I'm afraid she has like a gym phobia and will never work out again.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. She did make some pretty extreme sounds after that.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And we said, we shouted down, we weren't that worried to be quite honest, even though she was making a terrible racket.
- Martha Beck: There was a commotion upstairs.
- Rowan Mangan: We said, "What happened?" And you said, "I can't explain it with language. I have to show you." And look here you are explaining it with language to our grateful listeners.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. But the image isn't, you had to be there, honestly. Someday I'll film the whole thing, but I'm not going to be able to get her to do that again, because her will is stronger than all of ours.
- Rowan Mangan: It's true.
- Martha Beck: And she can hurt us all physically.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: With a kettlebell.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: But she can fly with a kettlebell too.



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Rowan Mangan: It's confusing.

Martha Beck: She must be half Hermes. Wasn't he the one with wings on his feet?

Whatever. Row, what are you trying figure out?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Good. I'm trying to figure out like the nature of your psychology?

Martha Beck: Oh God.

Rowan Mangan: There's a way that you have -

Martha Beck: Heaven help you.

Rowan Mangan: There's a way that you have of being positive that is confusing to me. And I appreciate-

Martha Beck: Why would that be, little girl? How would you be confused? I'm trying to confuse you, in a positive way.

Rowan Mangan: You're succeeding.

Martha Beck: It's sickening.

Rowan Mangan: Okay. Let's not call me little girl anymore.

Martha Beck: I know, it's gross. It's like, I need to go wash my mouth out. Oh, now that sounds bad. I just need to lie down. Go back. What were you saying? Come on, out with it. My psychology.

Rowan Mangan: So not so long ago, I asked you a simple question.

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: And I saw you struggle to be really positive. You wanted to be honest.

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: In answering me.

Martha Beck: Yeah.



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- Rowan Mangan: But you didn't want to make that honesty hurt my feelings or something.
- Martha Beck: This is a common problem. This isn't just me. What did I do?
- Rowan Mangan: I said to you, "Do you like blue cheese?" Simple enough question. I honestly, I've got to tell you, Marty, I wasn't that invested in the outcome of the question. I was just making conversation.
- Martha Beck: One can never tell one, when confronted with a question like that, unprepared.
- Rowan Mangan: So she looked like I was interrogating her and cast her eyes about wildly about the room, like I'd deviously talked her into a corner and now she didn't know how to get out.
- Martha Beck: Yes. How would anyone answer under this type of grilling, the third degree? "Do you like blue cheese? Come up with it now."
- Rowan Mangan: So this is what she said. She said "No, but I am aware that some people do." I was trying to figure that out for some time. Do you like blue cheese? "No, but I'm aware that some people do."
- Martha Beck: I didn't know. You treasure your connection with blue cheese. Like it could be so important you could have waited this long, years into our relationship, before you finally pop the question, "Do you like blue cheese?"
- Rowan Mangan: I think she's going to pop the question tonight.
- Martha Beck: And you don't want to just toy with your beloved's feelings. What if you had a whole blue cheese spectacle that you were about to present to me and I just condemned it with one word? No.
- Rowan Mangan: So when you say I popped the question was the confusion about the fact that I got down on one knee and had a little box that I presented to you-
- Martha Beck: Full of blue cheese.
- Rowan Mangan: Full of blue cheese. Marty, it's time.
- Martha Beck: It's time.



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Rowan Mangan: We'll be right back with more Bewildered.

I have a favor to ask. You might not know this, but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more faces, more eyes, more ears, all the bits that you could have a podcast in front of, that's what they do. So it would help us enormously if you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple, and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six if you can find a way to hack the system. I wouldn't complain. And a review would be also be wonderful. We read them all and love them. So thank you very much in advance. Let's just go out there and bewilder the world.

So Marty, this is a Be Wild Files episode today because we have been hearing from our beloved listeners.

Martha Beck: Oh.

Rowan Mangan: And sometimes it's more interesting to hear about what you all are trying to figure out.

Martha Beck: No kidding.

Rowan Mangan: Than what we are trying to figure out.

Martha Beck: Oh yeah.

Rowan Mangan: And if you're listening to this and you think, "I'm trying to figure something out. I wish I could play along."

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: You can. You can play along.

Martha Beck: You can.

Rowan Mangan: No worries. Go to my website, rowanmangan.com/bewildered. And I wrote out a nice little guide to submitting your questions.

Martha Beck: It's amazing.

Rowan Mangan: To us.

Martha Beck: How you did that.

Rowan Mangan: It is amazing.



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Martha Beck: I don't have the logistical competency, but go, go ask questions.

Rowan Mangan: So today we're going to listen to Bev. And here comes Bev.

Bev: Hi, my name is Bev. I'm from Ohio. I want to first thank you so much for this podcast. I love it and I am so grateful and it just speaks to my heart and I take away such wisdom. And thank you for the work you're putting out in the world. If there could be a future focus at some point on codependency. I am learning so much about that term and what it means and how it applies to my life as a mother and caregiver. And wow, I'm just becoming so much more aware and yet not able to navigate or struggling to navigate. So any insight would be, I would just be so grateful. Thank you.

Rowan Mangan: Thanks Bev.

Martha Beck: Thank you, Bev. Wow. This is a big one.

Rowan Mangan: And one close to our hearts.

Martha Beck: So close to our hearts.

Rowan Mangan: Our codependent little hearts.

Martha Beck: Yeah. And it originally was about, it's so funny because a book by Melody Beattie called ***Codependent No More*** kind of got the whole concept into the collective psyche and that book, her book's, helped me so much. And I just absorbed them when I was in my early 30s. And now they've done a re-publication of ***Codependent No More*** and guess who they sent it to for a blurb?

Rowan Mangan: I would have to guess Reese Witherspoon.

Martha Beck: Richard Nixon.

Rowan Mangan: He really needs to work on his codependency.

Martha Beck: Yeah, no, they did send it to me. And it's so nice that Bev asked about that because my whole brain is all sort of turned that direction as I read through this beautiful, wonderful book.

Rowan Mangan: So let's just get straight to a good working definition of codependency.

Martha Beck: Yes.



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- Rowan Mangan: Because I feel like there's where it came from, and then there's also just the way that term is used.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: In a sort of pop psychology sort of way.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: That is probably easier for most of us to relate to. If that makes sense?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. It was first about addiction and how that affects people. But now what they really discovered was that codependency is the way people typically act when they're around an addict that they love. But it's also the way they react when they're around anyone else that they love.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So it's an over care taking. It's basically putting someone else's wellbeing and behaviors at such a high level of attention in your mind that you actually forget yourself. So it's all about serving and helping others and making sure their lives are perfect. And you are not in the equation.
- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. And you can automatically see why Bev refers to herself as a mother.
- Martha Beck: Right.
- Rowan Mangan: With reference to codependency. And the reason we thought this was such a great question was because in our culture, for many of us, it is seen as laudable to have this disordered behavior.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Where you put yourself last and almost erase yourself in your caregiving for others. Right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. There's this light bulb joke. How many good mothers does it take to put in a light bulb?



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- Rowan Mangan: How many?
- Martha Beck: And the answer is, "Oh, no, you take it. I'll just sit here in the dark." And that's the virtuous mother paradigm.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And it exists a lot.
- Rowan Mangan: And what's so interesting.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Is that when I started thinking about doing a podcast on codependency, I remembered this thing that we did. I don't know, we hadn't been together for very long. We were living in California and we would get up in the morning every day one winter. And we'd sit down with our coffee in front of the fire. And we would read that Melody Beattie, we'd read from the Melody Beattie book. And then we'd just discuss our codependency, which didn't seem odd at all at the time. It seemed perfectly natural.
- Martha Beck: Because we were all flaming codependents.
- Rowan Mangan: But then a friend of mine came from Australia and we were just like, "So, this is the part of the day where we sit down and talk about our codependency."
- Martha Beck: Join our family.
- Rowan Mangan: So we read our little passage and we started talking about it and I was trying to include my friend and be like, "So do you find that in your codependency?" And my friend was a little bit offended and she said-
- Martha Beck: I would say quite a bit offended.
- Rowan Mangan: I would say so. And she said, "I just don't know how I feel about the fact that you are both just assuming that I'm codependent." And that's when Marty and I looked at each other, "That's a compliment we're paying you, thinking you're codependent." And that's when we realized that the culture is inside us.
- Martha Beck: Yes. It has fully possessed us.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.



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- Martha Beck: And of course, we immediately started groveling to your friend because that's what a good codependent does. "You're not happy with me? Okay. I'll do anything to make you happy."
- Rowan Mangan: That's what a good codependent. What does a bad codependent do?
- Martha Beck: That, but also then with a little murder afterwards.
- Rowan Mangan: Love it.
- Martha Beck: Because if you put all attention off yourself and on at other people, the natural response, going from culture to nature, is it feels wrong. It can feel like resentment. It can feel like exhaustion. And I don't think there's a parent out there who's tried to be a good parent who hasn't felt this way, like put the baby first to the point where you are falling apart. And it kind of is a natural thing that happens when you've got a very, very small infant. But then we try to make it persist throughout a life cycle where we're always there for our kids and we're always there for everybody trying to make them happy, the way you would try to make a brand new baby feel happy.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. So it's not just a dynamic that plays out in parent-child relationships.
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: It's often in spouse relationships.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And all kinds of different ones.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Friendships, even professional relationships. Because that's a good way to think about it is that you assume everyone else is as needy and unable to communicate as a newborn baby, so you have to read their minds, guess their needs, give them what they want before they even know they want it, and always keep them happy.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. So you project what they want and need. And then you try to do it before they're conscious of wanting it.
- Martha Beck: Even needing it.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.



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- Martha Beck: Just do something before they stop screaming. This is the code, when it's a newborn baby, I'm still talking about newborn baby. But when you grow up, it's more like if somebody says, "Well, I've been staying at your house for a day and a half and you haven't offered me any blue cheese." And then you're like, "Oh my God, get blue cheese." You don't want anyone else to be unhappy with you in any way or unhappy with life in any way.
- Rowan Mangan: And that's why you were being codependent when you refused to give me a direct answer.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: To the question, "Do you like blue cheese?" because you thought that I needed you to like it.
- Martha Beck: Well, I was trying to figure out if you needed me to like it. Because that's the whole thing of codependents, you're trying to figure out what another person's psyche is doing so that you can fill all their needs before they get upset.
- Rowan Mangan: And when we were chatting about this, you talked about how for some people in some relationships where there's the person who is receiving the codependent's attention gets really used to it and enjoys that. And so how does that function?
- Martha Beck: It's kind of the definition of entitlement in a way, because you get served by the other person and you don't even realize what's going on. So the metaphor I always use with people, once I figured it out for myself, intellectually, if not emotionally, is that if you ask a spider what it loves and whom it loves, it might tell you, "I love flies." Because spiders love flies, the way they crunch, the way they taste, all about flies is wonderful for a spider.
- Rowan Mangan: Sounds delicious.
- Martha Beck: And the way they express their love is to capture the fly and wrap it up alive in a little torturous straight jacket. And then whenever this spider wants a snack, it can go down, inject it's mouth parts into the living fly and suck out some life essence. And just go, "That was wonderful. I just love talking to you. We're such good friends. Because I always feel better after we talk." And the fly is going, "That's so interesting, because I do not."



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Transfer that to energy, attention, service to another person. The codependent is the fly, "I feel completely bound to sit here and wait for you to take my life energy for your needs." And the spider is like, "This is such a great relationship." So the person higher in the power hierarchy is often the spider and is being served by the fly. "I will give you what you need because otherwise you will hurt me." And the spider feels like they're best friends and everything's great, and the fly is being slowly consumed from within. And that's how codependency feels.

- Rowan Mangan: But the fly is participating in its own.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: Disempowerment.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: It's not like the spider catches it and wraps it up, the fly comes over and says, "I'm more than happy for you to wrap me up and suck my life force." Right?
- Martha Beck: I would argue that there is a net that the fly gets caught in, initially.
- Rowan Mangan: A web, surely.
- Martha Beck: Let's say you're a baby, you're a child, everything's great. You're a little fly. And then you just kind of encounter someone who is already a spider. So has the psychology of entitlement, addiction, whatever, there's that whole, it's the opposite of codependency. And that's a topic for another podcast. But it's basically a sense of being entitled to be served by codependent people.
- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Martha Beck: If your mother is highly codependent and does everything for you, you can grow up expecting that people will just do everything for you like your mother did. So at that point, I've lost who's who in this scenario, but say the fly is a girl fly, identifies CIS female, gets caught in a web and says, "Oh, okay. So this,"... oh, I have to start over. I'm just back.
- Rowan Mangan: She has become enmeshed in her own metaphorical web about a metaphorical web.



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- Martha Beck: Okay. You're a fly. You're born free to fly. And you go zipping about, you get caught in the web of someone who is already entitled, and then they get angry at you if you don't serve them the way their mother did or whatever.
- Rowan Mangan: All right.
- Martha Beck: Or they whine or they get sullen. Anyway, they give you clues that you're not doing it right. And as a happy little fly, you're like, "Oh, I want to make you happy." And before you know it, that's the string wrapping around and around and around you, is their reactions of feeling entitled and being angry or sad if you don't do everything they want.
- Rowan Mangan: Gotcha.
- Martha Beck: And it looks, as I said, like a lovely relationship, but it's really only lovely for the spider. And not even that. It's not good for anybody.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So how does the culture encourage this sort of relationship playing out? Because on the podcast, what we try to do is kind of pull aside the curtain to make ourselves conscious of where we're being manipulated by the culture away from our own truth. So I'm curious about, this is obviously a psychological phenomenon, but there's also culture at play in encouraging that kind of behavior.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Out of some of us, right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And it's pervasive. But the first thing that comes to mind is something that happened several decades ago, but the echo of it still resonates. And it was a radio program called Queen For A Day. And on this radio program, people would send in stories of the mother or wife in their family who is so depleted by constant care taking, she goes to all the soup kitchens and makes soup all day long, and then she comes home and she makes soup for us. And then she tucks us all in and she's wasting away, she's got several terminal illnesses, she's depressed. And they would try to build it up so this woman was so deserving of pity, and then they'd compete to see who deserved the most pity. And she got to be queen for a day and get her a new washer-dryer. I'm not even kidding.
- Rowan Mangan: To help her serve others more.
- Martha Beck: Yes. To help her serve others. And that was sort of the model of virtuous motherhood.



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- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So, I mean, it's hard to avoid the fact that this is a bit of a gendered thing.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: When you look at traditional gender roles. There is a lot of mother and wife in there. I don't think I'm imagining that.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. There are plenty of male codependents and male identified codependents, but it is true that it's for anybody who is higher in the power hierarchy, they're more likely to be conditioned to act like a spider.
- Rowan Mangan: To be served.
- Martha Beck: And that's true of race as well as gender. And then the people down lower in the power structure expect to be treated badly, expect to have to do things for others with no particular reward. They undervalue themselves. And yeah, women have been lower on the power hierarchy than men historically so it is much more identified as a female virtue. Virtue.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And that's what we were playing out, to my friend, we were like, "Well, we were just complimenting you by assuming you were codependent."
- Martha Beck: Yeah. That you give till it hurts.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, exactly. It's so interesting, I definitely feel that as a more recent mother to a half God, just that sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle, pressure from other people to obliterate myself in service of my child.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And I mean, I'm putting that strongly. It is a much more subtle thing. But I think it's what's given rise to the very common refrain that people use about borrowed from their airplane safety thing about you have to fit your own oxygen mask before your child's.



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Martha Beck: Right.

Rowan Mangan: And that gets applied to women's lives much more broadly because if we're all running ourselves ragged, at a certain point, we're not good to anyone.

Martha Beck: Right. Yeah. I do think also that if you've had to take care of someone or something, like a pet or a baby, and the most of the people doing care for very young babies are women, you get into that mindset of trying to be almost psychic about understanding other people what they need. And I got much more codependent during the times when my older children were tiny and had to sort of pull myself out of it and learn, well, I'll never forget, speaking of the way nature does things. When my older kids were about 12, 14 and 16 or 10, 12, and 14, they were sitting around like writing computer programs and stuff. I mean, they were capable of taking care of themselves, while I was making them dinner one day. And the TV was on and it was a documentary about bears, which the narrator pronounced bear.

And I'll never forget. I was making a salad and looking at the TV and the man said, "The mother bear will not do things for her cubs that they have learned to do for themselves, for this would make them ill equipped to survive in the wild." And I was like, "Wait, wait." And I looked at these three very competent human beings whom I was serving dinner. And I just said, "You know what kids? Things are going to change. If you can do it for yourself, I'm not going to do it for you." Because that is nature's way.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: And you actually incapacitate people by doing everything for them.

Rowan Mangan: So if we want to follow Bev and say, okay, to come back to our true nature, away from what's our wild nature here, away from the kind of culturally informed codependent.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Dynamic set of behaviors. How can we do that, do you think, Marty? How do we unhook from the spider-fly relationship?



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Martha Beck: The first thing is to notice that it's happening. I had people tell me a lot, a lot, like, "You seem really worn out and you're trying to take care of everybody and it's stupid." I mean, people were very blunt about that. So that's one clue.

But another clue is that you start to feel exhausted with other people and you have to go up away by yourself to regain the energy that you've expended taking care of other people. So you're exhausted around other people and it feels like a task.

And then the last thing is you'll start to feel, you will deny this, but you'll begin to feel resentful. Because anger is our boundary setting emotion, and resentment is a little teeny kind of anger. And you just feel like, "Really? Really? I made you six different kinds of blue cheese and you don't like any of them? Really?"

Rowan Mangan: No, but I'm aware that some people might.

Martha Beck: Oh, that's so good. I feel so much better now. So, yeah. And then it also can happen, and a lot of people, when it was about addiction, it's when you hit bottom, like an addict's hit bottom when they have some gruesome experience? For an addict it's when you realize that all the control efforts you're trying to use, I mean, sorry for a codependent, it's learning that you can't control other people, no matter how hard you try. You can't make them happy, you can't make them love you, you can't make them feel what you want them to feel or do what you want them to do. And so there's the resentment. There's the needing to get away. There's the clues from other people. And then there's this thing of, "Oh my God, this cannot work. I haven't been successful at making everyone happy even though I've spent myself trying to do it."

Rowan Mangan: So it strikes me that there's going to be a challenge as you try to change your behavior with people that you want to maintain a relationship with just on different terms.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I mean, you've had plenty of experiences this way. I mean-

Rowan Mangan: Sure.

Martha Beck: It's interesting because, you, at a certain point in your life were a caregiver for someone with paralysis, yeah?

Rowan Mangan: Quadriplegia. Yeah.

Martha Beck: And you always say, "That taught me to be a good helper," and you are crazy good at helping.



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- Rowan Mangan: I love helping.
- Martha Beck: I know, but it's supernatural. Maybe you are the God-half of Lila?
- Rowan Mangan: Hello. Which God is just a really good helper?
- Martha Beck: Bucephalus, the god of codependency. Actually Bucephalus was Alexander the Great's horse. But two people can have the same name. Anyway. How does it feel for you when you know you're exhausting yourself taking care of others? Because, look, you got a baby, you got me, there are dogs involved.
- Rowan Mangan: That's a weird bit of language.
- Martha Beck: It's Karen and Adam. And you're trying to cook. You think you should do everything. You think you should cook, you should clean, you should get Lila, give her a bath. You try to do everything and every now and again you burn out.
- Rowan Mangan: That's true.
- Martha Beck: That's the truth of it.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. No, that's true.
- Martha Beck: So how do you get back?
- Rowan Mangan: Well, I don't have to unhook from those behaviors with people who feel entitled to them?
- Martha Beck: Ah, true.
- Rowan Mangan: And I think that's the difference is, yeah, I tend to over help or over care take. Or, look, this is not good behavior.
- Martha Beck: Okay.
- Rowan Mangan: But what I start doing is being really pathetic and apologizing for not doing everything and waiting for you guys to go, "Well, we don't really expect you to do all those things." And then I go, "Really?" And you say, "Yeah, it's okay." And I say, "Okay, sorry for being passive aggressive."
- Martha Beck: "It's the only kind of aggressive, I can be."
- You're very right that that works only in situations where people don't feel entitled.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So if you're in with a spider and you start to say, "Oh, what about me?" I remember talking to one woman who was, she was a client. She was monumentally narcissistic. And she was like, "I can't believe these men I date. I mean, after a few years, it's always, 'What about me? Don't I count?' No, they don't count." I mean, there are people who aren't going to like it when you stop helping too much. They like you to be codependent. And it's still the worst thing you can do for everyone involved.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you think that with people who do feel entitled to that quality of care taking or whatever, do you think you can like restructure a relationship with them that's not based on that? Or if they're in that place, is it just probably better to move on?
- Martha Beck: I think you can restructure it. And that is the work of a lot of marriages, like straight marriages where there's cisgender norms. But the woman says to the man, "You're really entitled." And, "He goes, really? I didn't notice." And she says, "Yeah, you do." And same with white fragility. If people come and explain to me where I'm entitled and how I'm assuming my right to get things from them, I'm like, "Oh my God, I'm so sorry." And I changed my behavior. So that's, I think, the vast majority of people.
- Rowan Mangan: So you're just talking about where it's invisible privilege that can be worked with, but that's different from where there's actual narcissism.
- Martha Beck: Yes. and you don't know which it is until you start until you stop over helping.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, interesting.
- Martha Beck: And when you say, "Okay, where's the limit of my resentment? I'm really resenting talking to you for two hours a week so I'm going to cut down to one." And you say, "You know what? I'm really exhausted. You're my best friend or whatever. But I only want to talk to you for one hour a week until I'm less busy." and they go, "Oh. Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of," I mean, they get really nasty. The spider loves the fly, but only in a consumptive sense.
- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Martha Beck: And when you try to leave, they sting, they bite. And that's a really good sign that you should be out of there.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you have experience of trying to get out of one of these?



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. You may not know this, but I was raised Mormon.
- Rowan Mangan: What!
- Martha Beck: I know. It's crazy. Also later, you probably, I've never mentioned this, I went to Harvard.
- Rowan Mangan: Marty! There's so much-
- Martha Beck: I know. I never told you.
- Rowan Mangan: You just never tell me anything.
- Martha Beck: I never told anyone. But let me tell you a little bit about growing up Mormon. I later did some research on the subculture when I was a sociologist.
- Rowan Mangan: Let tell you something about growing up Mormon. Once I'd finished with it, I researched it. There you go.
- Martha Beck: I did. That's how I got out, get research credit for saving your life. So I was interviewing women and one of them said she went to her religious authority and she said, "My family makes me do everything for them. I'm exhausted. I can't take this much longer. And they treat me like I'm a second class citizen." And the guy looked at her and he goes, "But sister, you are a second class citizen." And so she was supposed to go home. Good Lord, I heard so many stories, not just in Mormonism, of couples going to a family therapist and saying, "He's fine, but she's exhausted. And can't seem to get her shit together. She's doing all these things and she's tired." And they would all sit around talking about what to do to medicate her so she'd be happy in that role.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: Instead of questioning the role itself.
- Rowan Mangan: The role, yeah.
- Martha Beck: And that was non-Mormon. There is this entitlement built into every piece of society and depending on where you happen to live or be born or be characterized, that's going to happen to you. And what you have to do then is-
- Rowan Mangan: No, no, no, no, no, no. I'm asking about you and how you have done this?
- Martha Beck: Was I climbing up on my life coaching pedestal again?



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Rowan Mangan: Yeah. You were a little bit, yeah. "What do you have to do is, no, no, no, no."

Martha Beck: You know that it's one of your jobs to buff my pedestal.

Rowan Mangan: Is that what you call it these days?

Martha Beck: Ooh. Wow. Wow. Pedestals the wrong word for lesbians, isn't it? Yeah, I'm not sure what you have to buff, but we'll talk about that in another episode. What I do, is not advisable, and that is I go to passive aggressive, I get sick, so that I literally physically can't, and then I'm trying even though I'm sick to do something. At a certain point, I get angry.

Rowan Mangan: Yes.

Martha Beck: And then I become what I call the exploding doormat. "Use me, use me, use me. Why do you always use me?" That's not healthy either, and I've tried to do a lot less of it in recent decades. But it's like you've got a pillow smashed against your face, first protest weakly, and then your survival skills will kick, your survival instincts. And what you want to do is stop it. This isn't what you want to do. Oh, my pedestal. What I try to do, is stop it before I kill anyone.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. No, I think so many of us relate to the exploding doormat.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: I've done that so many times.

Martha Beck: Yeah. You have to pick it up at a place that's not explosive, but it's still, a lot of us over helpers say that we don't have a right to get angry until we are literally about to die.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: The mother bear will not do for any other bear what that bear can do for itself. And that's better for all the bears.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I just realized that the mother bear, her ego might also be invested in, "The bears can't do it for themselves. Only I can do it for the little baby bears." Do you know what I mean? There's some ego work.

Martha Beck: Yeah. That's true.

Rowan Mangan: That the fly has to do as well.



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- Martha Beck: Can I talk about one more piece of research? I'm sorry. It's not mine. They found in the '80s when men were trying to step up and help more with housework, that a lot of the wives, when they would do studies on households, would shame and basically belittle and attack the husbands for doing the housework wrong. And it was like, "No, this is the way you do it. I hate it. It's too much for me, but I'm proud of the way I do it. And I get to control it." And so weirdly they were losing part of their own ego investment when somebody else took part of the job. And I've felt what that's like, when I think I know how to do something and someone comes to help and I'm just like, "I need the help, but you're doing it wrong." You have to let the other bears do it the way the bears do it. If they're not endangering life or country or whatever, let them do it the way they do it.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I'm all for that.
- Martha Beck: Take a nap.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm all for that.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Get off the web. Not the internet, the spider web.
- Rowan Mangan: Get off whatever web is causing you to over help and under care for yourself.
- Martha Beck: And if you are a bear, and you're caught in a spider's web, really, like buck up.
- Rowan Mangan: For God's sake.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, for God's sake.
- Rowan Mangan: Pull yourself together.
- Martha Beck: Yes. Yeah. Nobody's that codependent.
- Rowan Mangan: I think Bev has pretty much figured it out via this. What else?
- Martha Beck: Oh, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Don't you? How could she not have?
- Martha Beck: Bev, she's wrapped in spider silk. She's fighting her way out. She's exploding like a doormat. She's got bears everywhere. It's a wonderful time in the Bewildered universe.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I think all our bewilderment really just comes down to mixed metaphors.
- Martha Beck: That's really true.
- Rowan Mangan: Tragically. Mixed metaphors.
- Martha Beck: One of my kids once said to me, "Gosh, Mom, it must be great to make a living extending metaphors." And I was like, "It is. But I won't do it for you because you can do it for yourself."
- Rowan Mangan: You can extend your own metaphors.
- Martha Beck: So with that, I think it's time to say to Bev and all our wonderful people out there-
- Rowan Mangan: Stay wild!
- Martha Beck: 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. We're also on Instagram. Our handle is @bewilderedpodcast. You can follow us to get updates, hear funny snippets and outtakes, and chat with other fans of the show.

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