

Notes Toward a Subjective History of Honey

Four Fragments (699 words)

In Georgia, archaeologists found fruit that smelt fresh when they halved it; it had been suspended in honey for four thousand years. There were other things, too, including a wooden armchair and an arrow. I think of time capsules, sealed, in various places, of the atomic age that preceded my coming to consciousness, that shaped my early schooldays. I could never answer, as a child, that question of what I wanted to place in the capsule and I suppose I'm still not sure. I never keep honey; I consume it. I take photographs and I write notes; I have a desire to preserve paired with a confusion as to what to preserve, an ongoing question as to what is worth keeping. I wonder if I have lost or never found the things that are worth keeping. I wonder if I would still want them if they were under honey, sealed, fresh and untouchable.

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Whangarei never felt easy. We had to cross the Brynderwyn Hills if we wished to travel south, and the two coasts were forbidding. In the local park, there was a waterfall taller than any structure in the city. The tallest building was the hospital in which I was born. It was seen, once, as good luck to anoint a child with honey. I was, instead, the first baby in New Zealand to be immunised against Hepatitis B.

I spent most days with my mother. She woke me up, once, and said: *today we are going to see Tāne Mahuta*. We drove for hours and walked through a forest. If I stretched toward the trees I had to check my skin for leeches. At the end of the path was Tāne Mahuta, large and old, wider than the path and tall, stretching up and out of sight. I knew, then, that everything was larger than me, that I couldn't do much more than live in wonder, gazing upward at trees.

We went, after that, to Opononi and sat in a shed by the pier, watching footage of a dolphin from the 1950s. The town had been named after the dolphin, Opo. My mother was always driving around, learning about Northland. I learnt a lot, too, but

that was never the primary purpose. I was there because I was her child and I could not be left alone, until she died and I was left with Tāne Mahuta and Opononi stuck in my head.



For a long time, the temptation of sex was that it made me think of landscapes. I once asked somebody with whom I was sleeping to drive me to Cape Reinga; the night before we went, as we moved through a bed in Kerikeri, I thought of the road that led north while this other person thought, probably, of our bodies. Later, I said that I loved this person, but what I meant was that I loved that I could go to places I could not visit when I was alone.

But the land isn't fertile at the tip of that peninsula: there is no agriculture that far north and nobody has lived there since the lighthouse was automated. The last petrol station, in Waitiki, is also the last place at which to buy milk. *Reinga* is the Maori word for *underworld*. If bees tried to forage on that northern shore, they would be whipped out to sea by the wind, made messengers to the gods again.



I have been asking what it is that I wish to preserve and coming up only with something ineffable, with a feeling rather than an event or object. I look over my photographs and I remember my mood when I took them but when I read my diaries I seem measured, balanced, until I come to phrases that say explicitly that I was not. I am trying to communicate, perhaps, that I am more broken than I appear, that organised paragraphs and numbered pages are not a structure that mirrors my mind. I worry, though, about the kind of person who says: *pull yourself together*. I would like to register the way it feels to pull apart, to pool, to rain, to drip and cloy, to crystallise.