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Dawn Rae Downton on Sexy Siddhahs: Transcendental love

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Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has died at 91. But for his devotees, he'll have evolved, not died. And he won't have been 91, either. I knew him in the late 1970s and thought he was already 91 back then. He certainly looked it. His handlers in the Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement he headed said he was generations old, that one of the perks to his considerable enlightenment was to live impossibly long — and prosper impossibly well.

I knew Maharishi — Maharshi, we called him — better than most. In college, I shacked up with a TM “governor,” a sweet, if spacey, older-man boyfriend who was terrific in bed (also in parking lots and on park benches; he'd been at it for years, after all) but spent way too much time trying to fly. At 20, I'd had it with hunt-and-peck boys. Why fly when you can sleep with the best?

To the TM movement, my guy was an esteemed amalgam of “siddha” (in Hinduism, a perfected being) and TM teacher. In TM hierarchy, that siddha-teacher mix made you “governor” of celestial energy fields and grand stuff like that. Mine got to train with Maharishi in Switzerland, got to work (for no pay) at Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa (it flourishes still today, as a management school) and to go (at his own expense) to Costa Rica to help “stabilize” the White House as part of huge, weeks-long, 24/7 meditation efforts assembled by Maharishi for the purpose of wafting massive clouds of calm toward D.C.

But mostly my guy toured colleges like a circuit preacher, recruiting students to TM. I met him at Dalhousie University in Halifax. He was cute; deep, too. He said I had great legs, a great mind. He said it in that order — not that I noticed, not then. I was a TM groupie in love, and he led me to the master.

Though I never became a governor myself (and never met The Beatles or Mia Farrow), I did become a half-hearted siddha. That involved splashing out \$3,000 (an impossible sum which I “borrowed” from my student loan) and decamping for the summer to a covert resort in Hunstville, Ont. There, with 40 kids from across Canada, all pretty much like me (privileged, impressionable, perhaps in love with governors of their own), I ate millet and learned secret Hindu “sutras” said to give you Alice-in-Wonderland sorts of powers: everything from shrinking down as small as a mouse to becoming invisible — and, of course, flying.

Maharishi believed that flying was the ne plus ultra of human enlightenment. TM flying — hopping, more like — is done in the lotus position, and we knew flying sutra day had finally arrived when three insider girls showed up for breakfast in demure crinkle-cotton harem pants, rather than the sundresses they usually sported to beat the Ontario heat. That day, Maharishi himself taught us the sutra in a

basement stuffed with mattresses ... where we mostly fell asleep. The lesson went on and on. The heat found us, even in the cellar. My whole left side went numb. It was a sure sign of advancement.

But all I wanted was to meet my guv after class, stroll round the lake and turn in early. Alas, romance disabled the “fast cycling”— evolving — governors hoped to do at these retreats by feeding off the energy of juniors bouncing in the basement. I was crestfallen, confused. John and Yoko were enlightened, right? They didn’t pass up bed-ins.

Things devolved for guv and me. Back home in Halifax, I was an A student. But meditating twice daily with 80 additional minutes of siddhi practice was derailing my studying — and love. I didn’t care to be invisible, small as a mouse, light as cotton fibre in order to fly. I didn’t care that the sutras weren’t working. I didn’t even want to go to Costa Rica. I considered another path to enlightenment, or at least a paying job: grad school.

A snapshot from Christmas that year shows us cuddling over a gift from a Toronto friend, a framed photo of clocks in the window of a Yonge Street pawnshop. Guv has laid his wristwatch against it to punctuate the irrelevance of time in the yogic spheres. I’m wearing a red dress pinned with a pair of heart-shaped brooches. I’m hopeful, beaming, still innocent — sort of. I’m a lamb to his slaughter: I knew by then that he’d left a wife and three small children to follow his bliss, which wasn’t me any more than it had been them. “What do you want from your life?” he’d begun to quiz me.

He smelled a defector.

But in the end it was he who packed up with no warning while I was at class one day and drove off to Toronto in the VW van we’d bought (I’d bought: the student loan again). For days I vomited from the shock; my mother brought me soup, and crisp new sheets for my bed.

I didn’t use them. Instead, knowing he’d sell the van, I hightailed it to the library and searched the used car classifieds of the Toronto papers. I found him, got on a plane, convinced him I was committed to flying, convinced him to come home. Barely a month later, I returned from another class to find his half of the closet and dresser empty again.

That time I didn’t vomit. That time I did change the sheets. Mere boys began to look good again — safer, at least — and I began to forget him.

But I never forgot the siddhi sutras. I still know them, word for word. At Huntsville all those years ago, I signed a confidentiality agreement never to impart them. Really bad things would happen, karmically more than practically, we were made to understand, if we shared the secrets or grew disgruntled and ratted out the movement.

And now I’ve done both. Now, with Maharishi’s ultimate evolution, I forgive my guv, and I wish his guru the lightness of cotton fibre and a very good flight.