

A STATE OF MIND

by

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Dear stranger,

You've just entered the abyss of my mind.

Sigmund Freud¹ wrote that when a person “doesn't dream”, their subconscious is actually just prohibiting them from remembering their dream because it may provide information they may not be ready for. Past trauma memory fragments, for example. Apparently, Sigmund Freud was a horrible person² but I think his philosophy makes sense.

I suppose, I self sabotage my sole being. I do things until they're almost done and then I stop. Cold turkey. What's a finished room? What's a new car? What's a senior project? My dreams are like that, too. Blank. But I know they're there. I'm just not ready yet.

I don't know what I'm working on these days, other than myself, that is. I'm attempting to heal while I hurt. I'm the target of a pitching machine at one of those batting cages. As soon as the ball hits me, another one's coming.

Four summers ago, my father passed away. People dying will go as they lived, as they are. His name was Miguel Giovanni Fernandez. As a child, I idolized him even when he wasn't

¹ The Interpretation of Dreams is an 1899 book by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, in which the author introduces his theory of the unconscious with respect to dream interpretation, and discusses what would later become the theory of the Oedipus complex.

² There have been rumors of Freud sexually harassing his female patients, as he considered women to be weak, vain, jealous and lacking a good sense of justice.

around. I was a daddy's girl without a daddy until I wasn't. Miguel used to beat my mom and molest me. After his passing, I got involved with several men that ended up being him.

Two winters ago, I was raped by a friend I made at college. I can't remember much of it anymore but I do know it happens to a lot of other women. During this time, I ended up creating a photographic series about generational trauma after watching a French film³ about the inability to communicate. Growing up, I never had a stable male figure in my life. A lot of my mom's relationships were toxic and abusive. Her father died before she was old enough to remember him and I think that's why she's attracted to men that hurt her. Miguel is the reason I'm attracted to men that hurt me.



Renee Denfield, an American author who often writes about trauma, says even if we don't have an actual picture of our traumatic experiences, we have an emotional memory of it. I don't feel scared, though. I feel empty and full; void of feeling anything but feeling. Our bodies

³ The Diving Bell and the Butterfly; a 2007 French biographical drama film directed by Julian Schnabel and written by Ronald Harwood.

should be more respected than they are, don't you think? Figuring out who we are is hard enough on our own, let alone with the world interfering.

Last fall, I got sent home from college during a global pandemic. I still call it 'home blank home' because there's not much sweet about it. Since returning home, I've entered a war zone. I've noticed since the beginning of time, it's always been us against them. Some of us are simply more important than the other. With a name like Unique, you'd think I was set up for success. But I'm unique, not special. Someone once said we're not here to rise above others. If we were special, there'd be no room for each of us to achieve greatness. I suppose, 'us against them' is the mentality of all living things but we've taken it too far. White against Black. Rich against poor. Skinny against fat. Grandma, Johnny and Lexi against mom, Nia, Baby and I.

That isn't all though. Death has been following me around like the grim reaper. Faith, our family dog, was given six months to live two months ago. My grandmother, Columbia Marquez, passed away in March. I never met her. She traveled from Guayaquil, Ecuador to Brooklyn, New York in the 1990s and lived to be 94. Part of me feels like she had 94 years to meet me and didn't but I had 21 years, too. My pets and my plants have been dying left and right. I've thought a lot about my death, as well ... how I'll do it. I think I want to drown in the ocean - any one will do, maybe in Europe. I've thought about something quick and easy but I wasn't always nice.

I think suicide should be talked about more. Living is exhausting and feeling like not wanting to live should be normalized. To believe in something must be reassuring, and to think of an after seems beautiful. But I don't know if I do. I don't think I do.

My grandma, Roberta, is a Jehovah's witness. To her I'm worldly. Worldly refers to "outsiders" of her religion or "people of the world" but that just feels like another way to separate us. Since before the 1900's, photography has been used as ways to segregate and discriminate. Cameras were *designed* to photograph lighter skin⁴. Photographs emphasized the power dynamics of light skin and dark skin between colonizers and the colonized.

"A STATE OF MIND" focuses more on the power relationship between the viewer's gaze and my own. There's a self portrait of a shadow covering nearly the entirety of my mouth. In a way, I've been stripped of my voice, but my eyes are still on you. I want my stare to change reality. It's an oppositional gaze⁵. I'm hyper-aware of my vulnerability but I hold domination in my eyes.



I can only ever remember my body being for someone else. I wasn't allowed to wear shorts or tank tops around male family members or family friends. My school dress codes have

⁴ 'Kodak Shirley is the Norm', On Racism and Photography by Rosa Wever

⁵ Bell Hooks: In Black looks: Race and Representation, Chapter 7 (The Oppositional Gaze)

always been that girls weren't allowed to show their shoulders or any skin above their knees. In highschool, my grandma said if I dressed like a whore, I'd be more likely to get kidnapped and raped. By college, I was scared to walk to my dorm at night because I believed my body *wasn't* my own. But you are only able to see me because I allow you to. I have agency over myself and my body.

Power is an interesting concept and I think I finally understand it. To have power is to lack fear. And that would mean to gain power is to overcome fear. I fear a lot; my dreams, my past, my relationships, the night, the ocean, living, men. About fifteen percent of the world's population has mental health issues. I feel like a lot of us are often told to *face* our fears in order to overcome them but it's nearly impossible to think or function when you're flooded with anxiety. Taking time away is what I'm working on next. Taking care of myself. For now, I'm existing. And you're right, existing is a difficult choice and I'm *choosing* to do it.

This is **all** just for right now, though.

You don't realize how much you're carrying until you put it down.

In 10, 20, 30 years, everything will be different. I promise. It's a state of mind.

Sincerely,

Unique

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