

DIARY OF DESIRES



by Uliana Sunny



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PSYCHOLOGY & PERSONAL GROWTH

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Diary of Desires by Uliana Sunny

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If you are lying next to the man you love and feeling an emptiness, as if an invisible wall woven of unsaid words, stifled feelings, and the fear of rejection stands between you. If he misses you while being right beside you, sensing your physical presence but missing the emotional bond, that spark that once ignited your relationship. If the distance between you feels infinite even though you are in the same room, and both of you feel this alienation but have no idea how to bridge it. This state can be changed.

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From My Diary: My Body Closed Down...

One morning my husband reached for me to kiss me. Truly, deeply, the way he used to, back when every kiss was a promise and every touch was a bridge between us. I felt his warmth, his intention even before his lips touched mine. And once again, I turned my head away. The movement was habitual, almost automatic, as if my body had decided to protect itself before my conscious mind even had time to react. It was a reflex honed by hundreds of moments like this, a mute refusal I hadn't had time to think through or stop.

And then I saw his face. The sunlight from the window caught his profile, emphasizing every wrinkle, every shadow. He didn't say a thing. There was no reproach, no anger, not even a question. What flickered in his eyes wasn't resentment so much as a deep, almost physical exhaustion. The exhaustion of a person who has spent too long knocking on a closed door. He slowly lowered the hand that had just reached for me, picked up his keys from the small table, and walked out the door. I heard the lock click shut, and I felt how, with the closing of that door, a heavy, pressing silence descended on the room. It wasn't simply the absence of sound, but a palpable weight settling on my shoulders, on my heart, on every nerve.

Sometimes I wonder: how many times can a person reach out to you before their hands drop for good? How many attempts can love endure before it turns into a habit, and then into indifference? This question haunts me like an echo every time I push him away again, every time my body, contrary to my will, chooses withdrawal. With every moment like this, I feel something irreversibly shifting, I feel the slender thread connecting us growing thinner, threatening to snap.

I distinctly remember the moment I realized we were standing on the edge. This awareness didn't arrive in a single day; it had accumulated through many small "no's" spoken against my own truth, through imperceptible compromises and concessions that gradually erased who I was. Every "yes" to someone else's expectations, every suppressed need, every swallowed word—each was a brick in the wall I was building around myself. It seemed to me that I was becoming stronger, more resilient, but in reality, I was losing myself, my internal compass, my capacity to feel and desire. I had stopped listening to my inner voice, which had once spoken so clearly about my desires and my boundaries.

It was the beginning of the week—midnight on a Monday. Rain drizzled outside the window, and the city had slipped into sleep, but inside me an invisible storm was raging. He came into the bedroom and paused in the doorway. His silhouette was sharp against the dim light from the hallway. I lay with my eyes closed, but I felt his gaze against my skin—like an invisible touch that brought no warmth, only heightened my internal tension. Every muscle in my body was taut, braced for something I couldn't even name. Then came a quiet, heavy sigh—as though a whole lifetime of unspoken hopes and disappointments had settled inside him, as though he were exhaling everything that had gathered over the long years. He lay down at the very edge of the bed, leaving between us a distance measured not in inches, but in silence—thick, cold, almost tangible. It wasn't merely physical distance, but an abyss carved by years of unspoken feelings and suppressed desires. An abyss we were both afraid to acknowledge, but which had already become part of our shared reality.

Once, we used to fall asleep with our arms and knees tangled together, our bodies instinctively seeking touch to feel safe and warm. His arm around my waist, my breath in his hair—it was as natural as breathing air. Now, an emptiness lay between us. Cold, thick, almost tangible. Back then, I was still searching for its cause like a lost object, not realizing that this emptiness was a reflection of my own inner detachment, my inability to let him in even when I wanted to. My body seemed to be living a life of its own, separate from my thoughts and feelings.

I was nearly thirty-four. Five years of living together. Two children from my husband's first marriage, both nearly grown. A career built through my own efforts, step by step, against all the odds.

A husband who still tells me I'm beautiful, yet every time I slip away from his touch, confusion shows in his eyes. Do I not believe him? Or do I not believe myself? What is happening to me? Why does my body, which once responded so hungrily to his closeness, now instinctively contract as if bracing for an impact, as if defending against an invisible threat? It wasn't a conscious choice; it was a deep, ancient instinct that overrode all my desires.

He looked for an explanation for my detachment. He tried to understand what had changed, where he had gone wrong, what he could have done differently.

I was searching too. I ran through all the possible reasons in my mind: exhaustion, stress at work, age-related changes, routine. But none of these explanations felt complete; none answered the essential question: why do I no longer feel like myself around him?

It felt as though the support inside me had cracked. As if the very foundation holding up the entire structure of my life had been damaged. The sensation was akin to having the ground slip out from under your feet, leaving you suspended in midair without your familiar anchor. I felt fragile, vulnerable, like a house of cards ready to collapse from the slightest breath of wind. My inner wholeness, which had once seemed unshakeable, was now in question. I had lost the connection to my desires, to my boundaries, to my true self.

From the outside, I kept hearing the same things: exhaustion, stress, advice about yoga, warm baths, and a glass of wine before bed. Those words felt so far removed from my reality, so superficial. They didn't touch the essence of the matter; they didn't penetrate the depths of the abyss that had opened inside me. It was like trying to patch a deep wound with a band-aid.

And inside, a scream was rising. It was the silent scream of my body signaling deep inner distress, warning that something fundamental had broken. A cry for help that no one could hear because it carried no sound. A cry to return to myself, to my true nature, to the ability to feel and to be alive.

It felt like a slow, inexorable descent underwater, where every breath took incredible effort, and the world around me was losing not only its bright colors, but its clear contours. Sounds were muffled, thoughts grew viscous, and the air seemed to thicken. Every day I lived with the feeling of fleeing from something shapeless yet relentless, something constantly breathing down my neck. It was an invisible stalker that would not let me relax for a single minute, forcing my body into constant combat readiness, as if anticipating an attack. My shoulders were hunched so high they nearly touched my ears, my neck was tight to the point of stone-like hardness, my jaw was clamped shut to an aching pain, and the muscles in my back remained in constant tension, ready to spring. This was not merely physical strain, but a deep-seated spasm that refused to let go even in my sleep. My heart could leap into a frantic rhythm at three in the morning without any apparent reason, dumping a massive dose of adrenaline into my bloodstream that had nowhere to go. It surged through my veins, leaving me in a state of acute, exhausting anxiety and total depletion. It was survival mode, in which a nervous system built for an immediate response to an actual threat remained perpetually locked in "fight or flight," unable to distinguish real danger from everyday occurrences: a ringing telephone, an unscheduled work email, or even a simple question from my husband. My body was living in anticipation of a catastrophe that did not exist, yet felt inevitable.

Somewhere within this endless, draining tension, intimacy became completely inaccessible. It became alien, unwelcome, almost hostile. Touches that had once been a source of warmth and comfort were now perceived as an added burden, another stimulus demanding an immediate response from a nervous system already stretched to its limit. My brain instantly read them as a potential threat, as an invasion into my already fragile personal space. Any attempt to connect, whether a heart-to-heart talk or a simple glance, felt like yet another demand on a system with virtually no strength left, where every resource had to be counted. Any movement toward closeness, emotional or physical, triggered an almost instinctive impulse to step back, to pull away, because intimacy made me unbearably vulnerable. The fear of letting someone in that deep manifested as this detachment,

an obsessive need to control everything, an involuntary clenching at the slightest hint of emotional or physical closeness. I was terrified of being seen, terrified that my weaknesses would be discovered, that I would be hurt again. This protective reaction was stronger than I was, stronger than my desire to be close.

At the time, I could see only one thing: my husband was slowly but steadily drifting away. With each passing day he grew more distant, his gaze increasingly detached. And inside me, an unbearable sense of guilt was building for my own protective armor, for this invisible yet so dense wall I had built between us. I understood that I was pushing him away, that I was causing him pain, but I could not stop, as if my body were living its own separate life, refusing to obey my desires, my pleas. My mind wanted to be near him, but my body shrank away.

The most painful, heart-wrenching part was that he never once reproached me. Not a single word of condemnation, not one reproachful look. His silence was louder than any words; it spoke not only of boundless acceptance, but of a deep, hopeless helplessness. He saw that I was suffering and, perhaps, did not know how to help.

He grew quieter. His voice, always so confident, now sounded muted. He touched me less often, and those rare touches were cautious, almost hesitant, as if he were afraid of scaring me off or hurting me. He stopped suggesting date nights, walks together, those small moments that had once given meaning to our life. We turned into polite roommates, tied together by children, endless to-do lists, and rare, almost mechanical goodbye kisses that had become more of a ritual than an expression of true feelings. We planned everything: from grocery shopping to vacations, from after-school activities to home repairs—everything except time for each other. It was as if our relationship had become just another task on an endless to-do list, something we kept postponing for later in the hope that someday the right moment would come, that someday our strength would return. But that moment never arrived.

At get-togethers with friends or in cafés, I watched the couples around us. Their ease, their invisible yet palpable connection that revealed itself in the most ordinary, almost imperceptible gestures. How her fingers seemed to find his palm of their own accord, intertwining in a silent promise of support and tenderness. How his hand rested on her waist without words, without an invitation, simply as a natural extension of their shared space, their unbroken bond. They exchanged glances that only the two of them understood, smiled at private jokes, and a deep, comfortable intimacy filled their silence. And every time I saw this, I felt a heavy, crushing wave of sorrow rising inside me. It was not envy of their happiness, no. It was a deep, piercing loss of what was formally still present in my life—a husband, a family, a home—yet remained behind an impenetrable glass wall. We were side by side, breathing the same air, but an invisible, cold barrier lay between us, permeable neither to touch nor to real, living feelings. I could see their closeness, but I could not feel it in my own life, as though I were an outside observer of someone else's happiness, locked inside my own cage.

One night, around two o'clock, I couldn't sleep again. Insomnia had become my constant companion. An unfamiliar, ringing silence hung in the house. Usually at that hour, his even breathing or the distant noise of the street could be heard, but now there was only complete stillness, and I sensed that something was wrong, that this silence foreboded something significant. I got up and found him on the couch in the living room. The television screen was a black mirror, the room submerged in deep darkness, with only a faint, ghostly light from the window drifting in, outlining his silhouette. He was just sitting there, motionless, as if frozen, immersed in this silence that seemed denser than air, thick and oppressive. His silhouette was tense, and I felt my own body contract in anticipation of something important and painful, something that could not be ignored.

"What happened?" I asked, and my voice sounded too loud, too sharp in that viscous silence, shattering its fragile balance.

He took a long time to choose his words, his gaze directed into nowhere, as though he were searching for answers in the void. Then quietly, almost in a whisper, each word coming with great

difficulty, he said: "Are you still choosing me? Do you feel anything at all?" His voice broke on the last word, and I saw his shoulders drop almost imperceptibly, as if an invisible weight had fallen from them, or, conversely, as if he had finally surrendered under its crushing force. This man, whom I had known for years, almost never cried, never showed his weakness. For years he had borne the weight of waiting, enduring my emotional withdrawal, my silent walls that I had built between us without understanding how to tear them down. His question was not a reproach, not an accusation, but a cry of despair, a final, most heartfelt attempt to reach me, to break through my armor. At that moment, for the first time, I truly realized how deeply he had been suffering.

My chest grew unbearably tight, as though an invisible vise were squeezing my ribs. This was no metaphor, but a sharp, physical sensation: my heart clenched into a tight knot, and my lungs seemed to have forgotten how to fill completely with air. Every inhale took an effort; every exhale was shallow and ragged. And this physical pain was merely an echo of an internal struggle, because yes, I wanted him. I wanted to feel the warmth of his palm; I wanted our fingers to interlace effortlessly, naturally, as though they were made for each other. I wanted to be that woman who reaches for a hand first, who seeks his touch without fearing rejection or seeming needy. I wanted softness instead of this constant numbness that bound my body, turning it into an unbending statue. I wanted hugs to bring peace and relaxation, not another surge of tension, not another test of endurance after which I felt even more hollowed out. My heart reached toward him, fluttering frantically in my chest like a trapped bird, but my body remained locked away, as if in an invisible cage whose bars were made of fear and incomprehension.

Yet the road back was lost in a dense fog that enveloped not only the path, but my consciousness itself. The very direction seemed erased, and I did not know where to begin, where to go to find my way out of this labyrinth. My words sounded just as uncertain as my thoughts: "I'm trying," I whispered, and my voice was as feeble as my grasp of what was happening. "I really am trying to understand myself." He nodded, but in that motion lay such a deep, almost physical exhaustion from waiting, as if he had heard that answer many, many times before, and each time it had only added to his burden. In his eyes there was no anger, no reproach—only helplessness and sorrow, piercing me through and through. I saw him slowly, almost imperceptibly, resigning himself to the fact that I could not give him what he so desperately sought.

Sleep never came to me that night. I tossed and turned in bed, as if trying to flee from myself, from my thoughts, from that oppressive silence. I searched for an explanation for everything that was happening, running through hundreds of scenarios and questions in my head. In desperation, I opened my laptop and began searching for answers in articles about saving relationships, about how to bring back the spark, how to restore intimacy. But they left me with nothing but a sense of my own inadequacy, as though my efforts were always falling short, as though I were doing something wrong simply because I couldn't just "fix" our intimacy like a broken mechanism. This advice felt superficial; it never touched the underlying problem that held me captive, turning me into something foreign and incomprehensible even to myself. They spoke of techniques, words, gestures, but never of that invisible barrier standing between us, nor of that inner numbness that would not let me breathe.

Instead, I typed something different into the search bar, something that intuitively felt closer to the truth, to the very heart of my condition: "Why my body constantly feels under threat." That question became a turning point, the pivot on which everything turned. It flipped my understanding of the problem completely on its head, as if someone had suddenly switched on a light in a dark room, allowing me to see not only the mess, but what had caused it.

I came across material on a woman's wholeness, on how the body reacts to chronic stress, on how it essentially lives in a state of constant battle readiness. I learned that persistent tension does not dwell in thoughts alone, not just in anxious rumination, but deep within the muscles, in shallow breathing, in a racing heartbeat, and even in the skin, which becomes less sensitive. When the body exists too long in "fight-or-flight" mode, it begins shutting down everything it considers

"secondary" to survival. Sleep becomes broken and light, offering no true rest. Digestion falters, causing discomfort. Immunity weakens, leaving us vulnerable. And, most astonishing to me, the ability to feel closeness and enjoy it shuts down, because for the body, intimacy is no priority in the presence of perceived danger.

The essence of it lay in physiology, in the reactions of my nervous system, not in an absence of love or desire. My nervous system had become exhausted, overloaded, and it had chosen self-protection through withdrawal, through pulling away, as the only possible way to survive under chronic tension. Intimacy, as I came to understand, requires an inner anchor and a profound sense of safety, and I had neither. My body was in constant battle readiness, as if anticipating an attack, and in that state it simply could not relax and open up, even to the person closest to me. It perceived every move toward closeness as an additional demand, as a potential threat from which it needed to defend itself.

At some point I came across a blog that described the exact same states torturing me: the chronic fatigue, the guilt over my own emotional distance, the confusion of loving someone who stands right beside you and yet feels so far away. The author wrote that emotional openness is born of inner calm, of the body's ability to feel safe even when there is no visible threat around. And above all—that the body can be taught to come out of survival mode; that perhaps the point is not to suffer and survive, losing yourself in an endless struggle, but to learn the opposite: to reclaim your wholeness and peace, restoring that inner anchor step by step. It was a revelation, and it gave me hope.

I took an online test at three in the morning, sitting in the kitchen in the half-light, trying to stay quiet so as not to wake anyone. In that nighttime stillness, by the soft glow of my phone screen, the results gathered all my scattered sensations into a clear, frighteningly precise picture. It laid bare how my condition was affecting everything: how the body grows accustomed to living in constant anxiety, how even the slightest hint of closeness turns into an overwhelming burden against the backdrop of chronic stress. And most importantly—a way back did exist. Not through fighting myself, not through forcing my feelings, but through gentle actions, through gradually returning a sense of grounding and safety to my body, allowing it once again to trust the world and itself.

The books I found on that resource offered a completely different perspective on familiar problems. They spoke of brief yet remarkably effective interventions capable of interrupting the stress loop before it could take over entirely. Doubts remained, of course. After so many years of grueling torment, when every day had been a fight and every attempt to draw closer to myself or to another had ended in pain and disappointment, the idea of "simple" solutions felt almost naive. My mind, used to complexity and suffering as the norm, resisted. But desperation—deep and all-consuming—proved stronger than any rational argument. I was ready to try anything, even what seemed too simple, just to escape this trap, this endless cycle of survival.

The second week brought the first, barely perceptible, yet all the more astonishing changes. I felt my body beginning to thaw. It was like the earth slowly freeing itself from ice after a long winter. My jaw, which had been clenched for months in mute tension—as if holding in all the unsaid words and unlived emotions—finally relaxed. My muscles seemed to remember what peace felt like, that it was possible simply to be, without bracing for an impending blow. My breathing deepened, filling my lungs all the way to the bottom rather than staying shallow as before, when every breath felt like an attempt to keep my head above water. This physiological shift was the first sign: the constant inner hum of anxiety, which I had taken to be a part of myself, an inescapable backdrop to my life, began to subside. It gave way to silence—at first unfamiliar and even a little frightening, but then liberating. It was as though a loud background noise you had grown used to and stopped noticing was suddenly switched off, and you realized just how intrusive it had been, how much energy its constant presence had drained. In this new stillness, for the first time in a long time, I felt not merely like I was surviving, but that I was truly living.

The fourth week brought another, more tangible confirmation of change. One evening, while I was making dinner, his hand rested lightly, almost weightlessly, on my shoulder. In the past, such

a touch often triggered an inner tension, an invisible barrier that would rise between us in an instant. My body might freeze, or I might pull away unconsciously, even if I consciously wanted closeness. But this time, something different happened. This simple, seemingly ordinary touch sparked a completely unexpected response. My body leaned toward him on its own, as if remembering a forgotten movement, instinctively and without hesitation. It was not a conscious decision, not an act of will, but a pure, unclouded bodily response—as though a long-blocked mechanism had started working again, allowing me to feel closeness without inner resistance. In that moment, I realized that the walls I had built around myself were beginning to crumble.

By the seventh week, the changes ran even deeper. While we were watching a movie, sitting side by side, I was the first to reach out and take his hand. This gesture was not prompted by habit or duty, nor was it an attempt to meet someone else's expectations, but a living, genuine desire to be close. It was a desire that came from within, from the very core of my being, without fear and without second thoughts. The warm feeling that was returning slowly yet surely now manifested in this simple, profound gesture. It was a feeling of tenderness, trust, and quiet joy in another person's presence. He looked at me as if he were seeing a miracle, and his gaze held the same wonder and joy that lived in me. In his eyes, I saw a reflection of what was happening within me: a slow, gentle return to life, to openness, to the possibility of loving and being loved without constant inner conflict.

Three months in, we were no longer flatmates living under the same roof but separated by an invisible wall. We grew closer, and this was not merely a change in our routine or status, but a profound transformation of our relationship, of its very essence.

There is still very little perfection in our life, and I am not looking for it. I have learned to value authenticity over illusions. But the chasm that used to separate us—even when we were side by side, even when our bodies touched—had vanished. That chasm had been filled with my fears, his bewilderment, our unvoiced resentments, and a sense of constant threat. Now I fell asleep embracing him; I touched him easily, without fear or tension, without an internal dialogue about what it might mean or where it might lead. My body felt like my ally once more, not a source of relentless inner conflict, not a battleground between desire and self-defense. It became a home where I felt safe.

The guilt that had poisoned my thoughts for so long, whispering of my inadequacy, telling me that I was "not good enough" or had "fallen out of love," dissolved. A profound understanding set in: this had never been about my flaws or a lack of love, but about the prolonged defense mode in which my nervous system had been living. My body had simply been doing its job, shielding me from overload, which it perceived as a threat. I needed concrete tools to restore balance, so that my body could learn once again to open up rather than shut down in response to every external stimulus.

If you are lying next to the man you love and feeling an emptiness, as if an invisible wall woven of unsaid words, stifled feelings, and the fear of rejection stands between you...

If he misses you while being right beside you, sensing your physical presence but missing the emotional bond, that spark that once ignited your relationship...

If the distance between you feels infinite even though you are in the same room, and both of you feel this alienation but have no idea how to bridge it...

This state can be changed.

The body knows how to close itself off like a shell, protecting us from an assumed threat or overload, from whatever once caused pain or had the potential to cause it. This is its natural reaction to stress, trauma, and chronic tension.

The body knows how to open up again when it feels safety and support, when it is shown that the world is not so terrifying and that closeness does not equal vulnerability. This is a process that can be set in motion and sustained.

Sometimes a relationship needs just a few genuine minutes a day—warm and alive—to start this process. A few moments of authentic contact where you are present for each other without expectations and without defenses.

If you came to me for advice, the first thing I would tell you is something important that might change the way you see the situation: this is about defensive physiology. Your body is shutting down because it is doing what it has learned to do: protecting you from overload, pain, or threat, whether real or imagined. Even if consciously, with all your heart, you want warmth, closeness, and your husband, your body may be on a completely different wavelength, operating in survival mode, conserving your resources.

Why Does the Body Shut Down?

The body is a survival system. It does not judge your actions in terms of good and evil; it simply reacts to signals.

The nervous system has one primary task: to keep you alive, to ensure your safety. Everything else—closeness, sex, tenderness, spontaneity, joy—is possible only when the system (the body) feels: "I am safe." This is a basic, fundamental principle that is, unfortunately, often ignored or misunderstood in relationships. We try to build intimacy without ensuring foundational safety, and then the body, like a faithful guard, simply will not let us do it.

When safety is in question, the body engages its defenses. It doesn't ask, "Do you love your husband? Do you want to be with him?" Those questions are simply outside its domain. It asks other, more fundamental questions that are hardwired into our instincts, deep in the subconscious: "Is it safe for me to open up right now? Do I have the strength for this? Will I be hurt if I become vulnerable?" These signals flash in an instant, long before we have time to consciously register or analyze anything.

And if the answer to these instinctive questions is "no" or "I don't know," the body shuts down. Automatically. Without your conscious decision, without your desire. It happens like a reflex, the way your hand jerks back from a hot surface, the way your eyes blink in bright light. You may want closeness with all your heart, but your body has already made a different choice, guided by its primary task: keeping you safe and preserving your resources.

Three States of the Nervous System

In psychology, especially in trauma and stress work, a model is often used that clearly explains why the body "shuts down" and why we sometimes cannot control our own reactions. It helps us understand what is happening on a physiological level when we feel detached, tense, or drained. This model gives us a language to describe internal processes that once seemed inexplicable.

We have three basic modes that determine our state and, consequently, our capacity for intimacy:

1. **Safety and connection.** This is the state we strive to reach. When we are in it, we are relaxed, our breathing is deep and steady, and we feel "here and now," grounded, with solid support beneath our feet and within ourselves. In this mode, the body is open, muscles are relaxed, the heartbeat is calm, and the gaze is clear. It is in this state that true intimacy, tender embraces, deep sex, spontaneity, and joy become possible. This is a state of internal groundedness, where different parts of the personality are not at war with each other, and desires, feelings, values, and boundaries are aligned. You feel whole, and this wholeness allows you to be open to the world and to your partner.

2. **Mobilization—"fight or flight."** This is a state of high alert, when the nervous system perceives a threat, whether real or imagined. We feel anxiety, irritation, a desire to control everything, constant rushing, and internal tension that can show up in clenched jaws, tight shoulders, and rapid breathing. The body prepares for danger, for fight or flight. In this mode, intimacy is perceived as yet another burden, an added stress, something that demands energy you already don't have. "There's no time for that when you have to survive or fight," the body says. It is busy looking for a way out of danger, not building a connection.

3. **Shutdown—"freeze or check out."** This is a state where the threat feels so overwhelming that fighting or fleeing is impossible. The body "gives up" to conserve energy. We feel fatigue, emptiness, apathy, a sense of "I'm not here," "everything is in a fog," as if we are watching our life from the outside. All processes slow down; energy drops to a minimum. Intimacy in this state is nearly impossible because there are simply no physical or emotional resources for it. It feels as though you are completely depleted, unable even to move, and any touch or demand feels like an unbearable burden.

When you turn your head away from a kiss, when you feel internal resistance to an attempt at intimacy, this is often not “I don’t want you” or “I’ve stopped loving you.” This is your nervous system saying: “Now is not the time. First, we need to ensure safety, restore our strength, and get out of survival mode.” This is a signal about your internal state, one that requires attention, understanding, and gentle care.

Window of Tolerance

Understanding these three states of the nervous system brings us to the concept of the “window of tolerance.” This is our optimal range of functioning, where we are able to effectively manage emotions, stay in contact with ourselves and the surrounding world, and feel alive and capable of connection. When we are inside this “window,” we can remain in a state of “safety and connection.” But when stress or overload pushes us outside its boundaries, we fall into either a state of mobilization (hyperarousal) or shutdown (hypoarousal). And that is precisely when intimacy becomes inaccessible.

I know this state—of being outside your window of tolerance—all too well. I know what it is like to wake up in the morning and feel not the lightness of a new day, but a heaviness inside, like a stone lying on your chest, pressing down and keeping you from taking a full breath. I know what it is like to live with the feeling that every day is just like the one before, while pain, fatigue, disappointment, and despair slowly accumulate inside. It is like a slow fading, where you seem to be living, but feel less and less alive. I know what it is like to promise yourself, “Starting tomorrow, everything will be different; I’ll start a new life,” only to wake up in that exact same state, with that same heaviness and apathy, powerless to break out of this vicious circle.

I did not arrive at this realization, at an understanding of what was happening to my body and nervous system, overnight. It took time. A great deal of time. It took going through my own mistakes, disappointments, losses, betrayals, fears, and moments when it felt like I had no strength left, that I had hit rock bottom. Sometimes life literally brings a person to her knees, stripping away her familiar supports and illusions, solely so that one day she can finally rise as a different person—more whole, more aware, and able to truly listen to herself and her body. It was a long and difficult path, but it was precisely what brought me to understand how our internal system works and how we can reclaim our capacity for intimacy.

Wholeness is not just a pretty word; it is a real, tangible state of internal groundedness, where the different parts of your personality finally stop fighting each other. Imagine that your desires, feelings, values, and boundaries are individual instruments in an orchestra. In a fragmented state, each plays whatever it wants, creating a cacophony. You want one thing, but feel another; you value one thing, but act differently because you are afraid of violating someone’s boundaries or standing up for your own. In wholeness, however, they sound in unison, creating harmony. In this state, your self-esteem does not hang by the slender thread of external approval; it does not depend on what people say or think about you. It rests on a deep, stable sense of your own self-worth that comes from within, regardless of circumstances.

When you are in such a state, you stop operating from a place of deficit. This means you are no longer driven by core fears: the fear of being abandoned, the fear of being unwanted, the desire to constantly prove your worth, or the desperate need to fill an inner void. These fears pull at you like invisible marionette strings, forcing you to make decisions that do not align with your true desires and needs. You agree to things you don’t like, you stay where you feel miserable, just to avoid being left alone or feeling rejected.

The path to wholeness begins with returning to baseline, to that very point where there is only you. This is not selfishness; it is the foundation. It is like a system reboot, where you shut down all external programs and begin getting to know yourself anew. Who are you really? What do you love? What are you afraid of? Where are your personal boundaries, and what happens when they are violated? This getting to know yourself happens through living it out. Living through hardships on your own, without someone else’s safety net. This might be a period of establishing financial

independence, where you learn to manage your own money and take responsibility for it. It might be growing up, where you make decisions that others used to make for you. It is living through and mastering communication skills, where you learn not just to speak, but to be heard, to defend your opinion even if it differs from the majority. And, of course, learning to say “no”—one of the most difficult, yet most essential skills. Learning to endure silence, to be alone with yourself and your thoughts, without immediately trying to fill that emptiness with external stimuli or another person's presence.

Very often, it is precisely because of this deep-seated fear of living life alone, this fear of confronting your real self, that it seems easier for a woman to find a man who will supposedly become her support. The thought is simple: “I will find a man, and we will go through all of this together.” As the thinking goes, two together isn't as scary. But a trap lurks within this formula: you are not looking for an equal partner, but rather a savior. You do not yet know what you are like, what you want, or where you are going, and therefore you cannot choose someone who will walk alongside you rather than carry you in his arms. You project the role of savior onto him, even if he does not support you financially, even if you work on equal footing. His presence becomes a shield against the world: “We'll go sort out the paperwork together, we'll visit friends together—it won't be so scary.”

Imagine that throughout your school years you went everywhere with your parents, holding their hands. And now you have grown up, you have become an adult woman, yet at the crucial moment you fail to switch on the internal ability to be comfortable alone. It feels abnormal to you to handle going anywhere on your own. Of course, it is very often important for girls to go somewhere with a friend—to a workout, to visit people, to an event. That is natural; it is part of social life. But you need to cultivate the ability to go places alone, to run errands alone, to travel alone, to sit in a café alone. Not because you have to be a hermit, but because it gives you inner freedom and confidence. If you do not learn to be in a calm, safe state when you are by yourself, you will constantly cling to your partner. He might be the most wonderful person, but if you hold on to anything with your teeth, it starts trying to run away from you. It is very difficult to be around someone who is constantly clinging, someone who cannot breathe without your presence. Such attachment, rooted in fear, suffocates a relationship, turning it into a cage for both of you.

This was precisely the path toward finding inner ground and wholeness that I began to walk. A month after I realized the necessity of these changes and began taking my first steps toward myself, I decided to go out with a friend to talk. This was not just an outing, but a conscious desire to share what was bubbling up inside me. We agreed to visit an exhibition and then have dinner together, so that we would have time to talk unhurriedly. I wanted not merely to exchange news, but to speak about what was happening in my life, to share my new plans, which were only just beginning to take shape. I felt that I needed to move to another country. Where exactly, I did not yet know. How, I did not know either. But inside there was already a distinct, persistent feeling that I needed to move forward, to change something, and to take active steps toward it. We talked about everything: about relationships, about work, about the future, about how we saw ourselves in it.

And it was on that very evening, when I was open to the world and to my new sensations, that another completely chance acquaintance occurred right at the exhibition. I was standing near one of the paintings, immersed in my thoughts, when a man addressed me. We struck up a conversation, and it turned out that he headed the external affairs of a major corporation. The conversation started easily, effortlessly, as though we had known each other for a long time. I spoke about my work, and it suddenly emerged that I worked in a holding company that was a subsidiary of their corporation. It was an astonishing coincidence. He invited me to take part in their events as a guest. One of these exhibitions was due to take place in the near future, and this offer became another confirmation for me that I was on the right path, that the world was beginning to respond to my inner changes.

This experience, like many others, led me to an understanding of an important concept—the “window of tolerance.” Every person has an individual range, their own “window,” within which they

are capable of tolerating various feelings, bodily sensations, touches, and intimacy, while remaining in contact with themselves and the world around them. This is not a static state, but rather a dynamic capacity. When you are inside this window, you can feel anxiety, sadness, joy, or even slight irritation, but your internal compass continues to function steadily. You do not lose yourself, even if something inside sways slightly. You are able to notice your vulnerability, to acknowledge it, without letting it consume you completely. You remain connected to your body, to your thoughts, and to the reality around you.

When we move outside this window, we fall either into a state of hyperarousal—panic, anger, excessive activity—or into a state of hypoarousal—numbness, apathy, a sense of emptiness, detachment. Wholeness is not the absence of these fluctuations, but the ability to return to your window, to endure these states without losing yourself. It is the ability to recognize: right now I feel uncertain, but that is normal, it is temporary, and my internal compass is still here, guiding me. This allows you not to panic at the slightest inner discomfort, but gently, step by step, to return yourself to groundedness, to contact with yourself and with life.

Inside the window of tolerance: this is a state where your nervous system functions optimally, allowing you to experience inner harmony and safety. You are able to be deeply aware of your emotions without suppressing them or allowing them to overwhelm you. The presence of another person nearby is perceived as a source of support and comfort, rather than a threat. You easily receive affection, feeling its warmth and tenderness, and you yourself are capable of showing genuine tenderness without feeling discomfort or constraint. Your body is relaxed, your muscles are not tense, and your breathing is deep and rhythmic, which reflects parasympathetic activation and a sense of internal stability. This state allows you to be fully engaged in the present moment and to interact effectively with the surrounding world.

Above the window of tolerance: this is the hyperarousal zone, where the body and psyche react to overload, perceiving it as a threat. This manifests as mounting anxiety that can escalate into panic, or flashes of anger directed at yourself or those around you. An acute feeling arises that there is “too much of everything”—too much information, too many stimuli, demands, emotions. On a physiological level, this is accompanied by muscle tension, especially in the neck, shoulders, and jaw, a rapid heartbeat that can feel like a pounding in the chest, and shallow, ragged breathing. The body shifts into “fight or flight” mode, preparing for immediate action, which creates a feeling of internal instability and a loss of control.

Below the window of tolerance: this is the hypoarousal zone, a state of numbness and dissociation that occurs as a defensive reaction to excessive stress or trauma. The organism seemingly “shuts down,” attempting to protect itself from an excess of stimuli or unbearable pain. This manifests as profound fatigue, detachment from what is happening, and a sense of inner emptiness and apathy. The body becomes sluggish, movements slow down, and emotional responses are dulled. A person may feel “out of their body,” disconnected from reality, which is the nervous system’s attempt to minimize the impact of the traumatic experience.

If you have lived for years in conditions of chronic stress, your window of tolerance has inevitably narrowed. This is not simply a metaphor or a psychological construct; it is a real physiological change, in which the nervous system is constantly on high alert, like a taut string. In such a state, even the gentlest touch from your husband, which would normally bring pleasure and relaxation, can instantly cast you outside its bounds—either into hyperarousal or into hypoarousal. Then the body, acting according to an embedded survival program, instinctively defends itself: it turns away, tenses, clenches, shuts down, as if trying to create a physical barrier. It is vital to understand: this is not a whim, not a sign of bad character or an absence of love. It is a deep, unconscious reflex, a protective reaction of an organism that has learned to survive in conditions of constant threat, real or perceived. It is a mechanism that once helped you cope, but now stands in the way of genuine intimacy.

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