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LOREDANA DENICOLA

I AM YOUR MIRROR

Dedicated to all Human Beings

I Am Your Mirror

To be a photographer is like having a pass to capture other people's secrets.

My first idea was to photograph twelve strangers & myself that I would find through the Internet. These strangers, unpaid, would be free to choose a time and place to be photographed. They could express themselves as they wished, and could be anonymous, or not.

I meet them just for one day or two and I decided to lose control of a very vital element of photography by only working with natural or available light.

With some of them the connection was not easy; a few went no further than our initial meeting or email exchanges, others never arrived at their location.

I asked the strangers to look at the camera as if a mirror.

Then, I asked to write down a few words, something that could represent them.

Their vulnerability reveals fears, sexual fantasies, obsessions and secrets, giving voice to the frustrations of oppression from family, society and religion. It also reveals dissatisfaction, sacrifice, and — throughout — the idea of conforming to that which we are not.

We may grow up suppressing our feelings, and assuming rôles to protect ourselves. If, from habituation, we forget that these are mere rôles, then we forget our original selves. We forget who we are.

This project is deeply personal.

After years of damaging experiences, I needed to re-discover myself: to be authentic, rather than being what I imagined others wanted to see. On reflection, my experiences, after more than a year, have led me to realise that what I was looking for was confidence, courage, passion, respect, connection, sex, imagination, playfulness, my soul and above all — love.

'I Am Your Mirror' reflects both the image and concept that 'I am you and you are me'.

It is energy — and therapeutic release.

The process is the connection's making: the trust shared in the brief time spent looking through the camera or mirror, whilst beginning to get to know each other.

With photography, we can unlock doors; but, as by looking into a mirror, we can also disturb ourselves.

Do we like what we see?

HOW I MET MY STRANGERS

ABDUL

like Jane Fonda ...





“

I want you to take pictures of me
in my ballet gear,
and my colourful dance-wear
... aerobic-wear,
like the women in the 80s used to wear,
like Jane Fonda.

You know, the hot-and sexy-looking thong
... colourful leotard,
thong dance-pants and lovely leg warmers!

I could even dress up in pink ballet leotards and tights,
and wear pink pointe shoes,
and do pointe work,
balancing on the toes of my pointe shoes,
like a ballerina ...
and dance and prance and jump in the air,
and land on my toes,
like
a ballerina would!

You will like my ideas so much,
You will want me to do it,
and take pictures of me, ”
in my lovely leotard and sexy tights.



ABDUL

like Jane Fonda ...

In answer to my instinctive advert online, Abdul emailed, telling me that he was interested in taking part in my project. After a few messages, he proposed we meet in Spitalfields market, to introduce ourselves. He wanted to get to know me.

I remember his tiny figure approaching me that day, so fragile and with a very sweet voice. I was waiting for him outside 'Patisserie Valerie'.

He was a bit late.

He told me that his dream was to dress up like a ballerina, and be lifted up from his leotard by a strong, dominant female wrestler.

I was in awe.

I liked his imagination.

I tried to look for a dominant female wrestler in London, after meeting him. I went to different wrestling gyms but couldn't find any woman available to play with him, in my project.

His idea was a little bizarre. I could have found a model to make him happy, but a planned photoshoot wasn't what I had in mind.

He was sadly disappointed.

We sat outside 'Patisserie Valerie'. We had a coffee, talked about his life, his family and what he does, his job: he was a student. He wanted to become a nurse.

I asked him if he had anything to dress up in for the photo session. He said he had a pink ballerina dress and a yellow and black leotard. We agreed to meet at my place, in Stoke Newington, in a week's time.

I remember that day so vividly.

He came by car to visit me; it was early afternoon. He rang the bell and entered my flat with a couple of big, black plastic bags, full of colourful clothes, bought from Chinese shops.

We couldn't use his flat as I suggested, so we had to use my communal garden, which is situated downstairs, behind the building, where I live.

He said that his wife knew nothing about his dreams; that she wouldn't understand him and that sometimes he likes dressing up at night, when she is sleeping; playing alone in front of a mirror, and taking selfies in the mirror. He showed me some.

I am fascinated by the fact that, even now, we have to put masks on, with the people closest to us in our lives (wife, husband, friends, brother, sister ...), because we are afraid of judgements or rejections, and we don't have the courage to be who we are.

Many times I did so, with my parents, when I was a teenager. I had to lie to be accepted, because they did not like the truth about who I was. And I kept going like this for years, wearing a mask that wasn't mine, and acting how they wanted me to be, though deep inside, I wasn't happy.

I chose to work with strangers because it can be easier to be unguarded with a stranger, free as the connection is of emotional attachment in contrast to established relations, where possession often manifests. Additionally, meeting a stranger without knowing what will happen can be a frightening experience, as well as an enlightening one.

I didn't plan the photoshoot with Abdul: I wanted everything to be spontaneous. I wanted to play with him, naturally. I used an old 35mm camera with a black and white film, borrowed from a friend.

At the end, I realized that, with a planned photoshoot, everything would have looked more amazing and fashionable, in a certain way!

Those pieces of clothes that he brought with him, in a black plastic rubbish bag, were very colourful, and colour film or transparency would have been perfect for the situation.

But, for this project, I wanted to photograph strangers as they were; present, at a given, unique moment!

I needed only one important ingredient: human connection, with its energy speaking from the heart, linking both parts involved in the process of liberation. Those moments were real and true.

Abdul is a Muslim; married, with two small children. He loves his wife with all his heart, yet she is unaware of his obsession: that he loves Jane Fonda, and wants to be dominated by a strong female wrestler, and loves dressing up like a 'ballerina' and dance.

Sometimes, curiosity brings me into difficult but unique situations.

I didn't direct him. I let him be himself, free to be who he is. I didn't have much time ... an hour.

I wasn't judgemental.

I let anything and everything happen.

During the 'I Am Your Mirror' photography project, where I dealt with 12 strangers plus myself, I set a fixed time limit of an hour for photographing people.

I had this limit because I realized that the subject photographed begins to lose, after a certain period of time, his spontaneity, and starts to pose, instead of being himself.

There is a loss of magic. In fact, the picture that I love most is always the first.

The situation required me to be completely immersed in the present moment, when the liberation from fear was happening: I had to manage the overall feeling, mine and the other party's; and be in control emotionally, while using a film camera, considering the technical aspect and photographing the 'unknown'.

My first idea was to go to his place, to use his flat as a location.

I think locations are perfect and give a more detailed explanation of the subject's character.

But, he didn't like the idea. It was too intrusive.

My garden was forgotten and untidy, and I wasn't sure that it could be a good choice for a location, but at least I could give him freedom of expression, and he could dance and move freely.

I have always liked my own tireless curiosity: the fact that I will never, ever content myself with superficial appearances, but always be driven by desire to enter unknown worlds, sometimes elusive, other times dangerous ... and in that danger is hidden my excitement, accompanied by the desire always to discover something new, fresh, surreal, which — without that curiosity — I would never have known.

I have a big, open mind. I love my mind. One day, it will take me to a grand scale creation.

What is appearance? It is too restrictive. You cannot stop at the 5 senses of perception, using only a rational mind, otherwise we lose all the rest, and what is real.

However, using his flat wasn't possible.

He has a wife; he is Muslim, and he has two children.

She doesn't know about his dreams. I am a stranger, and I know.

I think that at some point in our life, something happens. We explode and collapse, from an urge for personal expression, catalysing a liberating declaration of our vulnerability, oppression and dreams — and the recovery of ourselves from our assumed rôles.

That day, it was freezing. The light was not good and it was very cloudy. I had no extra lighting, and I was using a cheap, analogue camera, with a black and white film, 400 ISO Ilford, which wasn't even mine.

I kept going with what I had.

He got excited at one point. I think he was enjoying himself very much in my presence.

He said that he was dancing for me.

He was dancing and jumping in the garden, like a ballerina would, and I was amazed by his spontaneity.

In some pictures you can see the wet on his pants. I wasn't expecting that, honestly. I realized that I was giving him the chance to be himself, ever hidden in his room as he was, with nobody to talk to about it. Now he could talk: he could show off.

And I can understand him. We have this little child inside us, who wants to have fun and be free! We are all humans, and made a certain way. Weirdly or not, we are who we are: unique.

All went smoothly: he knew that I wasn't judging him; I was part of a real, theatrical performance of life, and we were having fun!

He was happy. I was happy too.

We were doing a performance, in a certain way, both of us. The camera was the pass to a different world that I would never have accessed without it.

One thing that fascinated me was his showing me his performance, in such a confident and convincing way. Once you really get to the stage of being comfortable, you start to understand

JAMES

The Businessman





“

*In Japanese culture there is a term,
'Otaku',
which describes
an obsessive interest an individual
has outside their 'normal' professional life.*

*Otaku is particularly prevalent amongst Japanese businessmen,
who commonly work for the same employer,
for their entire career
and have little chance,
otherwise,
to express their identity.*

*This constraint, imposed by a professional
obligation to look and act
in a certain manner,
is reflected in my obsession,
'Shibari'.*

*Simply meaning 'to tie',
Shibari is a form of artistic rope work
that illustrates the sense of powerlessness
felt by the constraints
of the professional world
in which I must live ... ”*















ROBERT

The Christian

Robert is the third 'stranger' I call him the Christian.

He answered my advert, saying that he would be pleased to take part in my photography project, and that he was fascinated by the title, 'I Am Your Mirror'.

His idea was to pose nude, in a big forest.

He is married, and has 3 children — and so wouldn't have wanted to use his house in Sussex, even if his wife had known that he was doing a naked photo session with me.

Through emails we agreed to meet up straight away, outside Epping underground station, and on the day of the photo session, without knowing each other.

For a few months during the summer, Epping Forest was my personal photography studio.

It was an amazing experience!

Robert, my stranger, loves nature.

Epping Forest was the perfect spot for his pictures.

He wanted to be represented like an animal, naked, and with his face covered.

I took a few masks with me that day; I wasn't sure if he would want to use them.

A week before, I had asked my niece, Erica, to draw and send me a couple of masks.

She is 6 years old and lives in Italy. She made a colourful rainbow fish and a bear for me.

I like the simplicity of her drawings — and that was exactly what I was looking for: innocence.

I brought them with me, along with two more masks, a pig and a bull, that I bought in a party cake shop, in Dalston, East London. I found them funny, so I thought I could use them.

He said that he is Christian, and that he goes to church with his family, every Sunday. He is part of a community, and doesn't want to be seen by the other people in the church, because they won't be able to understand him, and will mis-interpret everything.

I went to Epping underground station. I arrived 10 minutes early.

I am always punctual — I learned this from my previous paparazzi/press job.

I waited outside the station, impatiently.

I didn't know him — he hadn't sent me any of his pictures, so I didn't even know his face, but he knew me.

After 5 minutes waiting outside the station, he called me on the phone, asking me to walk up the street to find him, as he was waiting for me inside his car, and he couldn't come down to pick me up.

I followed his instruction and began walking up the street: I couldn't wait to see my third subject.

Then, at some point, I saw someone walking towards me, smiling.

He introduced himself.

'Hello I am Robert, how was your trip to Epping?' — he said.

He sounded gentle. I said that all was good, and that I was happy to meet him. I jumped into his car.

I was beginning to feel comfortable meeting strangers randomly in that way, and while he was driving to the forest, to find a place to park his car, we talked about who he is; about his past, when he was bullied, and his family, wife, job and children.

Then he parked the car.

He said he knew the forest very well.

For me it was the first time.

Earlier this summer, the Guardian revealed that car parks and wooded areas in Epping, Waltham Abbey, Chigwell and Abridge were being advertised on websites as meeting places for sex between strangers, an activity known as 'dogging'.

I asked him if Epping Forest was really used for sex between strangers?

He confirmed that it was, saying that he had seen people having wild sex in the woods a few times.

I was utterly fascinated by the place — so immense, magnificent, theatrical and obscure.

He suggested going deeper into the woodland, as he didn't want to be seen naked by those people that were walking around Epping Forest — and there were many.

My stranger didn't want to be seen. Why?

I agreed, and we moved, looking around for some interesting spots and light.

'Are you not afraid to walk with a stranger?' — he asked me.

'No I am not ... why do you ask?' — I answered.

'You must be very brave for doing this. You know many things can happen in life. Are you a criminal, or do you have a gun hidden somewhere?' — he continued.

That sentence made me laugh. 'Do I look dangerous?' — I asked.

'Yes, you do, there are not many women doing what you do' — he answered.

'Maybe I am dangerous' — I said, laughing.

My stranger was feeling a bit afraid of me. Well, it is rare to see women embracing these kinds of experiences. Truly, in these situations, anything is possible.

However, I trusted in my gut feeling, with which I was connected directly; and, strange as it may have been, I felt safe.

I didn't fear anything.

I have always liked it when people open up to me: I feel like they can trust me and I can trust



SEAN

The Underground Worker

Sean is the sixth stranger I met online. I call him, the 'underground worker'.

I remember he sent me quite a few emails, before taking part in the project. He was a bit undecided and confused; one day he wanted to take part, and another day not, so it was a little difficult to deal with him. I received his email one Thursday.

He said:

'Hi — I am not sure if I would be suitable for this, as I am very slim and hardly have any hairs on my chest, but I would love to meet you. I sometimes cross-dress (my size is 8/10) and I have always wanted to wear a white wedding dress. I also have quite a lot of boy clothes, and would welcome the opportunity to take part in your project. I am a genuine person. My number is ... Please call me — I live nearby.' Sean

After reading his email, I remembered that I knew him already.

I had met him a couple of months earlier, while I had been doing some portraits of males for fun, and had been looking for subjects. Even on that occasion, he had decided that he didn't want me to take his portraits, after initially proposing it. I reminded him that I had already met him once, and that I had been wasting my time dealing with him on that occasion, because he let me down.

He assured me that, this time, he was committed to co-operate with me. He really wanted to show me the clothes that he bought from his favorite shops. He was looking for a white wedding dress, but he couldn't find one. He is very slim, and the sizes available were too big for him. He had bought some other dresses, that he liked very much, and he wanted to wear one.

I didn't know what he had in mind. But I trusted him.

I was looking for subjects who wanted to take part in the project spontaneously. I personally don't like chasing people. I am more interested in energy.

One evening, looking at my emails, I found another message.

He said:

'Lore, I am off next Tuesday (I don't know if you saw the text I sent you on your mobile) and I would love to meet you for the photos. I have been gone a bit crazy, shopping around, so I have some quite new outfits that I want to show you, if you are free.

Hopefully the weather will stay like this. I finish at 7 pm after my late shift on Monday, so after 10 am on Tuesday would be great ... it would be early enough to meet at my home, and then go somewhere together. I could bring some of my stuff, and do a few changes.

Are you up for this?' Sean

I didn't know what he had in mind. I understood that he was a bit confused, and excited, too.

I answered, saying that was perfect for me — and that I was looking forward to meet him at his place, and I already knew the address.

The next day, the sun was shining brightly, high in the sky, with no clouds — quite unusual, here in London. I felt happy and unhappy at the same time; I had to meet him at 10 am, so, in my mind, I was imagining that I would be taking his pictures, outside, at 12 noon, when the sun was high and shadows directly below — I knew the light wouldn't be great.

I felt a bit disappointed about the overall situation; there was no wedding dress, and the sun was high in the sky. However, at least it wasn't raining and that was good.

We could get something. I focussed on being positive, and gave myself a lift.

Remembering my project, I recalled that it states that subjects can choose a time and a place to be photographed, as they like. Having assembled all my equipment, the model release, films, light meter etc, I went to meet him, enthusiastically. He lived not far from Stoke Newington — where I live, actually, as well.

I decided to walk and enjoy the day and, once there, I rang the bell.

He lived on the second floor, in a flat inside a block building, near Clissold Park.

He didn't hear me — he didn't open.

I was worried. I thought — maybe he has changed his mind again?

But, after 10 minutes, he came down to open the door.

I saw a big smile on his face. He looked happy.

'Hello!' — he said — 'I was waiting for you! Come with me, I want to show you the clothes I have chosen for us.'

I smiled at him — finally he had decided to be in the project. I felt better and relieved.

While we were walking up the stairs to the second floor, he kept talking without stopping. I couldn't understand him very well. We went upstairs to the first floor, through a long corridor, and then took further stairs to the second floor, where all the rooms were organised perfectly on both sides — with an atmosphere similar to that of an hospital — and then, finally, we arrived at the last door, numbered 388, which was his room.

He opened the door, and a strange smell, like something rotting, came out.

It was bad.

I went in with him.

There was a small room and a small toilet.

He had all the clothes layered on the floor, next to his double sized bed.

There were also shelves — many of them, on the wall, and above were wigs, make-up, books of all genres, cds, puppets and yet more clothes. I didn't know how he could live in that space — it was so small and stuffed with clothes.



KAROLI

The Builder

Karoli is my seventh stranger, 'the builder'. He replied to my advert online.

He comes from a small town, in Hungary. He has lived in London for 20 years, and works as a builder and decorator. He has many clients, and feels happy and satisfied with his life. He owns his own company and he has a wife.

She comes from Asia. She is small, lovely and very young.

When first I met him, she was pregnant, and they were expecting a daughter; he was going to become a father for the first time.

He was deadly happy.

Karoli is a 45 year old man, with dark hair and of average size.

He looks trustworthy; he is very open, and talks about everything without any problems. Without knowing me, he opened up, telling me several secrets about his love history, how things had gone wrong and how much he had suffered, recovering from bad women.

'They ruined my life' — he said — 'til I met my wife'.

He made me laugh, because of the humour with which he told me his stories.

He is a naturist — he likes walking naked in his house, and amidst nature. He also showed me some of his pictures from when he was a youth, naked in the forest, proudly showing some erection.

'My ex-girlfriend took them' — he said — 'I was young and handsome. What do you think? Do you like them?'

For many years, he has been working and developing a personal project, for which he is looking for funding.

His dream is to build a vast, magnificent centre in Hungary, immersed in nature and surrounded by trees, where all artists can visit and use the space; sleeping there, living temporarily, creating art all together and being naked, and in contact with nature.

He needs funds, from someone who can believe in his idea and finance the project. He will then take care of the rest, building the 'Bed and Breakfast', and creating the place, all out of wood. He works well with wood, he said. At the moment he is very busy with work, and doesn't have time to pursue his dream consistently, but he assured me that it will happen soon: it is on his agenda.

His idea for 'I Am Your Mirror' project was to be naked in front of my camera-cum-mirror.

He would always have posed nude for me as, for him, that is natural — he is not afraid of it, as many are.

Nakedness reveals itself; nudity, for him, is a form of dress.

'My clothes are my skin' — he said.

'Nakedness makes us democratic: adornment makes us individuals.'

He proposed that we use one of his houses or flats, where he was working, as a location.

When he met me, he was working on two sites as a builder.

I could take some pictures of him there; he was alone all day, and we could organise something. In exchange, he wanted me to take some other pictures of him, quasi-naked or erotic, another day, which he would use for his own purposes, especially promoting his nature project.

I agreed.

One night, I found his email.

He was asking me to meet him in North London at 6 pm, just for a small chat, the day after. He would pick me up from Costa coffee, in his van, which was just a few meters away from North Finchley station.

I agreed.

The day after, I took the tube and went to meet him.

I arrived 15 minutes before the arranged time, and sat outside Costa coffee, having a hot drink.

He texted me, saying that he would be there in 10 minutes, and asking me to wait for him, after the first traffic lights on the corner — next to an off-licence, and to be ready to jump into his van.

I took my hot drink in my hands; the day was cold, as I waited for him after the traffic lights.

At some point, I saw a small, green van approaching, and someone inside waving at me from the window.

I thought it was him, so I waved back.

My phone rang. It was him.

He wanted me to walk down a bit further, and turn off the street to the right, which I did.

He stopped his van, opened the window, and greeted me, shaking my hand.

'It is nice to meet you. Thank you for coming!' — he said.

'The pleasure is mine' — I answered.

'Would you like to have a coffee?' — he said.

'I already have one with me, in my hands' — I said, smiling.

'So, would you like to get into the van and talk about your project? Or do you want to go somewhere? I have just finished work right now, so I am a bit tired. It's been a hard day' — he said.

'That's ok, I already have my coffee, so I will come with you in the van.'

'Jump in then! Let's go somewhere else ... I can't park here. What is your project called? I don't remember', he said.

'I Am Your Mirror' — I answered ...

'Oh yes, sure' — 'how could I forget that name?' — he replied.

So, I got into the van.

'... I am driving somewhere else — I hope you are not afraid, I am a good man' — he said.

'Not at all' — I nodded — 'that's fine. I know you are a good man.'

'Are you worried?' — he said.

'Not at all' — I answered — 'are you?'

'No, I am not, I am just curious to know what your project is about' — he replayed.

Listening to the way he was talking, he had a strong East-European accent. He drove the van away from where we were, to an area close to a football field, where he said we would be safer. I could see teenage boys playing football on the field.

'So what is your project about?' — he said ...

I said that I was looking for people with obsessions, fears and sickness, or even happy people with dreams, who would like to pose in their own way in front of my camera, as before a mirror.

I explained that this was because I was obsessed with negative thoughts, and considered that maybe documenting other people's obsessions could be beneficial for me and for others: like two mirrors, each reflecting the other.

'What is your obsession?' — I asked.

'I don't know if it is an obsession' — he answered. 'I am a naturist' — 'I like to be naked, especially amidst nature. In Hungary I have a house, and when I work there I work naked.'

Have you never worked naked?' — he said.

'Not never, but it would be fun to work as a naked photographer. That could be an idea' — I laughed.

'What is your obsession?' — he said.

'Negative thinking' — I answered. 'It is killing me. But something, slowly, is changing. I have recognized the lie that I am telling myself, and I am able to watch my own mind. I am still at the beginning.

I have started to do meditation, and everything is getting better' — I said.

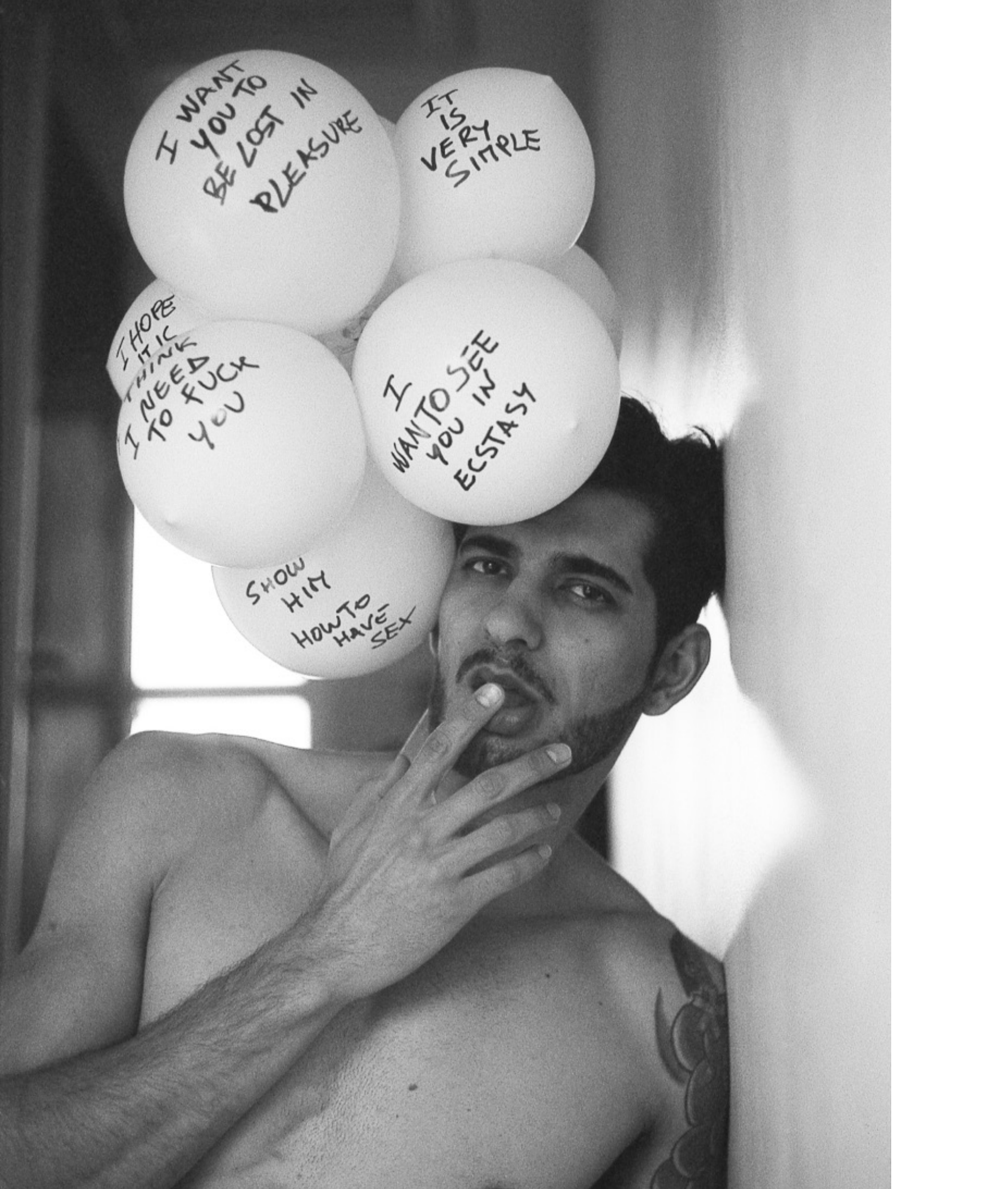
Then he talked again, about his project and the need for funding. I said that I was happy to give him something back, as he was helping me with my project.

'So, what do you want to do with me?' — he said.

'Nothing' — I said. 'You have to tell me what you want to do with yourself, and how and where you want to have me take pictures of you.'

'I am building a house now' — 'it is around this area. If you want, you can come one morning, and take pictures of me there' — he said.

'That is a good idea' — 'I liked it' — I nodded.



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ROBERTO

The Brazilian Model

And then I met Roberto. I call him the Brazilian model.

He is my twelfth stranger.

A female friend introduced him to me. They were working together in a restaurant. He needed a photographer for making a promotional video. He wanted to take part in a competition and win the chance to be chosen as a model.

The prize was a catwalk in London.

Roberto is Brazilian, his mother is Italian.

He lived in Italy, when he was a child, till his teen age.

He speaks Italian but he does not know a word in English, even if he is been living in London, for few years.

That is why my friend contacted me.

Because I am Italian, he was easy for him to explain me what he wanted for his video.

This was also the main reason why he could not find much work as a model in London. And worked more for Italian and Brazilian photographers or TVs.

When I saw him I was fascinated by his beauty. Without a doubt he is a handsome young boy, tall, dark hair, big black eyes, fit body. He does many sports, karate, tai chi, kick boxing, his dream is wanting to become a personal trainer, also he had a very fascinating smile.

Roberto is 28 years old, he is a fashion model.

I helped him in making the video. It was a success. We remain in contact.

Then, one day, I asked him if he wanted to take part in my photography project 'I am your mirror' like a model.

I asked him if he had any obsession.

He said that his obsession has always been to be a model and that he lives the life of his dreams.

He just gives himself completely to the photographers and he likes to be photographed.

He is very sexy.

Even, the way he was talking with this Italian/Brazilian accent, made him more interesting.

I remember, at that time, he told me he was living with a female model, Jenny. She is English.
 He met her during a fashion photoshoot for a British magazine, few days before meeting me,
 and at that time he was living with her temporarily.
 He came back home only in the evenings.
 They were sleeping together but they were not talking much.
 He doesn't speak English.
 He told me that they were having sex and that the situation was perfectly ideal for him.
 He could sleep somewhere, without paying the rent, plus he was having lot of fun.
 Then, he showed me some pictures of them together.
 She looked beautiful as well.
 He told me he was in love with his life and his modelling work, because he had the chance to
 meet beautiful models, around the world, with whom to spend the night and time together.
 So, life in London was generous despite all the financial difficulties and the lack of work.
 He was determined to break into the British fashion industry. He had the look of a Brazilian/
 South Italian male, masculine, not sure if his look was suitable for the British fashion market.
 He likes having sex and has never had a hard time in finding a girl.
 As beautiful as it was, it could certainly be like that.
 He also told me about some sexual experiences he had in London, kind threesome he had
 with older women, drunk, finding himself at home after a long night of revelry. He was living
 an exciting time and he was happy.
 Roberto decided to help me with my project and accepted my proposal.
 We decided to meet in my place, as we couldn't find another location.
 I always liked to go and photograph people where they live. Their place reveals their personality
 and makes the documentation of the subject more intimate, interesting. During this project
 only three encounters gave me the chance to photograph them in their place/flat.
 The rest refused or preferred to meet me somewhere else. Or preferred to not take part at all.
 I had few refusals, 7 or 8 strangers put me down, at last minute, after meeting me. I was using
 mostly two locations, during all the year. One was Epping Forest and the other my small flat
 or my communal garden.
 I wasn't well organised.
 I wasn't very happy, but I had to be positive and try to be creative as much as I could with what
 I had, which wasn't easy.
 Roberto told me that he was obsessed with sex, in that period of time, and with his work.
 Despite he was beautiful to see, he had that little shyness that is not normal or unusual to
 find in a male confident model.
 I liked that side of his character, this sweet vulnerability.
 I found that he was respectful, and a good listener.
 I was captured by his beauty and smile.
 It's hard to work with handsome men.
 I found myself few times, in situations like this one.
 I was imagining him with white balloons on his head.
 I thought that the balloons could represent his hidden sexual thoughts.
 Or maybe my hidden thoughts, as a reflection in the mirror.
 We arranged to meet in my flat.
 That day, he arrived earlier.

“ When I was a child,
I felt a sense of belonging.
I was lucky enough to live in the countryside,
with only sunshine and nature.
I thought
I was immortal,
that life was eternal
and that I would live forever.

However, they said that I wasn't pretty enough;
slim, with my short hair and masculine look:
a tom boy, riding my purple bike.
They said I wasn't clever enough,
playing in the street instead
of studying at home;
that I wasn't responsible enough,
the oldest of four children but the most chaotic;
that I was negative: I wanted to see perfection
in my little life-experiments,
but for others that was negativity.
I wasn't social enough:
I preferred to stay alone,
jumping from trees,
or fighting with some boys in the street,
coming back home bruised all the time;
not physically strong enough to go to the Art School
outside my town aged 13;
not trustworthy enough to go out
aged 15 with friends 'til late,
always conscious
that my father was waiting for me to beat me up
when I got back home
or would refuse to open the door,
leaving me outside ...

I never understood,
What was I doing wrong.
Then, I learnt to lie ...

One thing
I wasn't giving up was being free.
At the age of 16,
I wasn't girly enough:
I had no tits, which I have never had,

and I had not had my period yet.

My mother was worried,
thinking that I was a sort of 'freak'.
We went to the doctor, several times,
who re-assured her that I was a normal girl.

The girls in my class were passing their tampons,
and asked me if I had one, or if I had condoms.

I said — no; they were laughing.
I hadn't any condoms either.

Actually, I didn't have sex.
I felt disconnected from boys and girls.

Death has knocked three times.
The first was almost being aborted;
the second was when I fell off the terrace,
and went into a coma;
the third was when I had an accident
with my motorbike.

I broke both of my legs in half.
I couldn't walk for 8 months,
and was trapped in a hospital bed for 28 days.

Afterwards on a wheelchair ...
The following year, I removed my plasters,
and broke my left leg again ...
another four months on crutches.

Then, finally, I managed to go to University,
working in a bar while I was studying Economics.

There is violence in all of this,
but I am still here.

Now, honestly,
I don't give a shit what you think of me
when you see me.

You dismiss me as nothing.

All our thinking is based on our personal experiences:
reality is based on perception ...
so, before judging another person,
look at yourself.

Is that person,
who you see in the mirror, 🎭
who you want to be with? 🎭





“We need tremendous energy to bring about a psychological change in ourselves as human beings, because we have lived far too long in a world of make-belief, in a world of brutality, violence, despair, anxiety.

To live humanly, sanely, one has to change.

To bring about a change within oneself and therefore within society, one needs this radical energy, for the individual is not different from society - the society is the individual and the individual is the society.

And to bring about a necessary radical, essential change in the structure of society, which is corrupt, which is immoral, there must be change in the human heart and mind”.

Jiddu Krishnamurti

STRANGERS

Abdul, like Jane Fonda

James, the Businessman

Robert, the Christian

John, the Ex-prisoner

Yasemin & Umit, the Family

Sean, the Underground Worker

Karoli, the Builder

Giorgia, the Poetess

Stephen, the Carpenter

Rina, the Violinist

Toni, the Artist

Roberto, the Brazilian Model

Loredana, the Photographer

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All texts of 'How I met my Strangers' are written by Loredana Denicola.

All photographs are taken by Loredana Denicola and may not be used or copied without her written consent.

Pictures are taken with three different cameras: Leica 35mm, Mamiya 645, Mamiya II 6x7,
using black & white film, and in this book they are cropped.

Gelatin Silver Prints available, limited edition of (10) with Coa (certificate of authenticity)

Year: 2013/2014

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