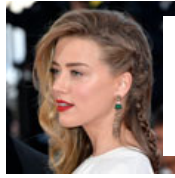
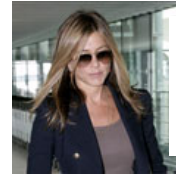


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MY DREAM DATE: NEW GUY, COLD MUSEUM FLOOR, CRUSHING ANXIETY

Enticed by the strangeness of a "Dream-Over"—for \$216, a date and I get to sleep under a piece of artwork at New York's Rubin Museum—I abandoned my love for order and exposed myself to the chaos of lucid dreaming.



Getty Images

By Elyse Moody

Sex & Relationships
May 21, 2014

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TWEET 1

I'm not the kind of person who often thinks to herself, "The universe has got this." My desk features two, sometimes three, to-do lists and files of meticulously labeled folders. It may look like OCD to outsiders, but it's actually a more generalized anxiety—the relentless kind that tells me if everything is spotless nothing can go wrong—that drives my

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perfectionism. But an event I attended last weekend, and a series of coincidences surrounding it, has got me thinking about a new way to let go.

In mid-March, I noticed a friend's Gchat away message about a dream experiment. It involved sleeping under Himalayan art at New York City's Rubin Museum—an event called a [Dream-Over](#). I was intrigued and pitched a story about it. My editor responded quickly: "I like it, but I like it even better if it's a date!" I wasn't seeing anyone at the time, but I hoped something would work out and RSVP'd for two. (In case you were wondering, a Dream-Over date will run you \$216 and secures you and your plus-one a sleeping nook under the same piece of art.) The entire idea-assignment-reservation sequence transpired in under an hour; uncharacteristically, I didn't labor over the details. Weeks later, after Tom, a guy I'd gone out with a few times, mentioned meditation and having once visited a Tibetan doctor, it felt easy to invite him to come along.

Easy. Not a word my anxious brain uses very often.

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I started to really wrestle with anxiety, obsessive over-thinking and stress-fueled freakouts, in college. I'd worry myself in circles until I literally got sick. My doctor prescribed different medications, but being on them made me feel as if I were staring out an airplane window into a cloud. After that, she told me to wear a rubber band around my wrist and pop myself at the first sign of hyperanalysis. (That didn't work either.) Finally, she suggested I devise a code word to say whenever conversation turned circular. Walmart had a bumper crop of kumquats that spring, and my roommate, Jean, kept buying them. That became our word: kumquat. Jean and I have been kumquattting each other for almost a decade now.

However, I wasn't thinking about kumquats when Tom and I got to the Rubin Museum at 8 p.m. on Saturday. I was preoccupied by logistics: Did I forget something? Would there be an awkward, couple-y focus?

The instructions said to dress in pajamas and slippers and to bring an air mattress and blankets, but beyond that I didn't know what to expect.

A docent showed us where to drop our things: under *Mipham* [Chakri Wangchuk's](#) *The Sixth Summer*. *Chakri Wangchuk's*



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Chokyi wangchuk, the Sixth Shamar. Coincidence number three: "Our" painting depicted an important figure in the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism; funny enough, Tom had studied at the Karma Kagyu center in Boston.

Bells chimed: 9:15 p.m. In the theater, we joined more than 100 adults—wearing everything from printed kimonos to velour jumpsuits—attempting to sketch their assigned artwork from memory. Then, Kyabgön Phakchok Rinpoche, a thirtysomething Tibetan Buddhist teacher, spoke to us about using “dynamic” or lucid dreaming to confront fear and anxiety, the idea being that consciously confronting a fear or worry in a dream is as effective as doing so IRL.

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Meditation is key for peak dream awareness, he explained. Remind yourself as you drift off, "I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming." Bring your focus to your forehead softly, he instructed, then to your throat; and then to your heart. Bells chimed again, the room darkened, and we practiced.

Next, we met with Ali, the “dream gatherer” who was to wake us at 6 a.m. to ask what we’d dreamt. Our camping neighbors were an older couple who’d been on the Rubin’s waiting list for three years (since the last Dream-Over, which, like this one, sold out); a girl and her boyfriend who had bought tickets for her thirtieth birthday; and a psychic (yes, really).

After that, we settled onto our air mattress. The overhead lights dimmed. Tom looked at me in the half dark and said, “Do you think we need to blow up the air mattress more?” It would have been a logistical feat, dragging it across the gallery to the outlet without bumping into anything priceless. To my amusement, since he’s so relaxed, he copped to being “a little OCD about it.”

But just as we were weighing the pros and cons, a docent came over to read us a “bedtime story” about our painting. This was one of the potentially weird items on the agenda—when was the last time another adult read you and your partner a bedtime story? But, coincidentally, the tale was about a kumquat (seriously!) that inspired a student to embark on a mountain quest. I couldn’t help but smile.

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The live sitar music ended at midnight, and afterward, we were serenaded by the sounds of the bathroom door clicking shut and the toilet flushing. I dreamt anyway. In my dream I was being prepped for surgery by Mary Kay ladies (*what?*) when suddenly a baby, who looked a lot like Hercules, appeared. Don't judge! I've been watching a lot of *Twin Peaks* lately. Anyway, its content wasn't as meaningful as the fact that when Baby Hercules popped up, I realized that I was dreaming—a clear step toward lucid dreaming. I sat up, looked around the gallery in that strange semi-REM state, and felt reassured. I slept until six, when I recounted it for Ali.

I wasn't enthused about the 8 a.m. group dream analysis (in fact, Tom and I slept through the breakfast bells and considered skipping it), but then I didn't want to pick apart my dream. I came away with the opposite conclusion: not to analyze too much.

Later that day, before a long nap, I explained the kumquat thing to Tom. He didn't think it was strange at all. That's basically how mantras work, he told me. They act like placeholders to refocus you on the present. I've been thinking about taking up meditation, and the Dream-Over outlined a method I can try. Starting tonight my new mantra is: kumquat, kumquat, kumquat.

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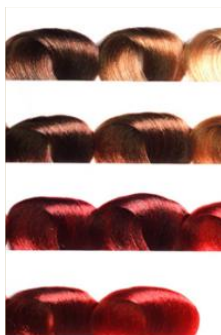
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