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# THE DAY MY GURU MOVED IN

*In need of a mind, body, spirit overhaul, NYC writer HOLLY MILLEA invited Ayurvedic therapist CAMERON ALBORZIAN to move into her flat to treat her. The fact he's a former SUPERMODEL had nothing to do with it, honest...*

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PHOTOGRAPH (POSED BY MODEL) JAN WELTERS

For 20 years I've lived in the same lovely, large, sparsely furnished Upper East Side studio in Manhattan. I take pride in my unencumbered existence because, even before an old love's recent death, my grandmother's passing and losing a close friend to cancer, I felt the emptiness of things and the weight of stuff, and I've wanted to be able to make a clean getaway.

Look up and you'll see me standing at the five-foot-high windows, watching people looking to see if there are any cabs available. I'm not going anywhere, but I find them somehow soothing.

Not long ago, I saw a woman, a bouquet of purple tulips in hand, run across the street on an amber light and get hit by a truck. From my watchtower I could see that she was gone, that she actually didn't know what hit her. The driver sat on the kerb, crying. The police came to interview him. The ambulance came to take away her body. Firemen removed the manhole cover, turned on the hose, and washed her brains and the flowers down into the dark. The next day when I looked out of my window, it was as if nothing had happened.

A sadness had been creeping up on me for months, maybe years, and now, this event plays on a loop in my head. With every rerun I recede further into an existential funk that, while poetic in a teenager, is not so attractive at my age. ➤

I safeguard my friendships and family by staying away. I become so elusive that I only exist on paper, when published. Which means I haven't existed for months, because the thought of writing anything – a grocery list, a cheque – overwhelms me. Even leaving my apartment has become an ordeal.

Concerned by my disappearing act – and desperately needing me to write something – my editor takes drastic action. I receive an email from her that reads, mysteriously, 'He arrives tomorrow morning...' I skim the attachment: 'Cameron Alborzian [right] is an Ayurvedic therapist who was one of the hottest male supermodels in the late 1980s... moves in with patients to help cure them of ailments or simply teach them how to live a healthier lifestyle...' Oh. My. God.

The phone rings. It's him. I explain this week's no good because I need to clean (ie, lose 10 pounds) and maybe we could meet next year. He commands me not to touch a thing: 'I need to see how you live in order to help you.' My cellulite giggles. My dust mites cheer. He says he's emailing a questionnaire and I shouldn't drink coffee or eat before he arrives, and oh, 'You have a spare bedroom, yeah?' Honey, if I had a spare bedroom, I'd be sleeping in it. 'No problem,' he says. 'I've slept on the floor in India next to five people.'

That would be Kerala, India, the birthplace of yoga and Ayurveda – a 5,000-year-old system of medicine that eschews western practices of pill-popping and surgery for a programme of diet, herbal treatments and yoga to keep the body and mind healthy. Ayurveda means 'life science' and is based on the theory that the body comprises three elements, or doshas – vata (air), pitta (fire) and kapha (water/earth). Everyone has a unique percentage of each dosha, with one more prominent than the others. Pitta people

tend to be intense, intelligent life-grabbers. Kaphas are unflustered, nurturing types, and vatas are movers and shakers. An imbalance in your inherent dosha state manifests itself in psychological and physical symptoms.

Hence Cameron's questionnaire, which will deduce my dosha and any disparities, with queries ranging from the mundane (eating, sleep habits) and the personal (medications, menstruation) to the embarrassing (urine, stools) and the unimaginable (exercise, sex). I fill it out, hit send, and run off to buy an inflatable bed.

He's early. I buzz him in, annoyed that I didn't have time to curl my eyelashes. As

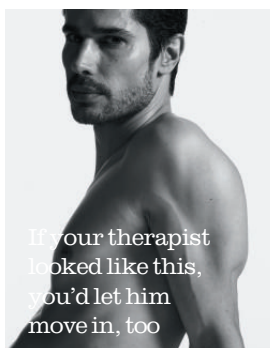
I open the door, my eyes do a *boing!* He's the guy in Madonna's *Express Yourself* video! I run to my Mac, YouTube it and scream, 'I'll be Madge, you be you!' But Cameron gets down to business. He takes my pulse: 'A bit high.' Checks my eyes: 'I'm looking at the whites, the size, colour...' He is half-Iranian and half-British, and his eyes are soft brown and clear, kind and unblinking. Cameron radiates warmth and a Gandhi-like calm (had Gandhi been about 6ft tall with 12-pack abs and modelled for Versace, Armani, Chanel, Gucci, Guess, and Dolce & Gabbana). 'Your skin is a bit red, which tells me there's something going on with your digestion,' he notes. 'Show me your tongue. From your questionnaire I surmised that you are a pitta with an air imbalance. The lines on your tongue confirm that, as do the ridges in your nails. An air imbalance makes you more anxious, more nervous, with some depression, doesn't allow you to sleep...' repels men, makes me late on

deadline and wanted by the tax man...

'Your eyes are reddish and yellow,' he continues. 'This indicates that there's stuff going on in your colon.' Cameron scans my eating habits. 'Sugary cereal for breakfast,' he says, shaking his head. 'That messes up the pH of your stomach. Your mind wants to eat sugar and drink coffee – your body doesn't. It's screaming, "No more!"' He must be hearing my neighbour's body, because right now mine is hollering, 'Let's go to Starbucks!'

'You're being ruled by air at the moment, so earth's the element you're missing,' says Cameron. 'Earth makes us more rooted. Air makes us flighty. Air's one job in the body is to move downward. Once it starts moving up into this area,' he presses a hand to my chest, 'you're going to get headaches, insomnia, poor digestion, constipation. Which is what I'm seeing in you now.' Lovely.

We go shopping for herbs and foods, engaging in a karmic conversation on the way. I always assumed there was good and bad karma. Cameron puts me straight, 'Karma is neutral. The karmic world doesn't know good or bad, just action and



If your therapist looked like this, you'd let him move in, too

*'He's the GUY in Madonna's Express Yourself video! I run to my Mac, YouTube it and SCREAM, "I'll be MADGE, you be you!"'*

reaction. You throw it, and it comes back to you and teaches you the lessons you need to go through. Once you've learned everything you need to learn in life, it's time to go.' I think of the woman who was hit by the truck. Did all her life's actions and reactions lead her to that end, or was it a few lousy precious seconds debating which flowers to buy?

Cameron says, 'People fear death. But there's nothing sad or scary about death. To a yogi it's just, "Oh, time to go."' His ➤

expression is so serene, I could almost drink from the karma cup. Almost.

Five o'clock is Ayurvedic dinnertime – eating late hampers digestion and puts pressure on the organs. We stop off for Indian food. Eating birds, or anything with a heartbeat, is a karmic no-no. 'You wouldn't eat your dog or your cat,' Cameron says. 'Why would you eat a cow or a pig?' Because they can't fetch and won't use a litter box.

'Fruits and vegetables in season have the highest nutritional value,' explains Cameron, who eats 'one, maybe two' meals a day. He orders basmati rice with our curried veggies because it's easy to digest: 'Brown rice is what they use to make the strongest glue – think what that means to your colon.' As for booze, 'Alcohol poisons the blood,' he says, tearing the cocktail menu from my grip.

Back in my apartment, Cameron sets up his massage table and hands me strips of cloth to fashion into a bikini while he goes into the kitchen with his bag of oils and elixirs to heat the ingredients for my karna purana – a nerve-calming procedure. I lie on a towel on the table, and he turns

*I lie on a towel on the table, and he turns my head, SLOWLY pouring warm oil into my ear, sending SHIVERS down my body'*

my head, slowly pouring warm oil into my ear, sending shivers down my body. He massages my scalp and turns my head and pours oil into my other ear. More chills. In a word: ear-otic.

I digress into stress, fretting over how I'll fall asleep without a bottle-sized glass of wine. 'My priority is to get you sleeping well,' Cameron says, calling a 10pm lights-out.

As we tuck into our respective beds, I'm wide awake with the unusualness of having a man spend the night. A stranger,

no less. I mean, just because Cameron's beautiful and Keralasmatic doesn't mean he might not be... dangerous! Ooh, wouldn't it be great if he were?

I ask Cameron to tell me a bedtime story about a man who morphs from a supermodel into a superguru. He takes me back to 1986, when he was a college student in London. An agent spotted him on the street and persuaded him to run off to Paris, where a month later he was strutting the runway for Gaultier, 'wearing spandex and high heels. I was like, "Yeah, I've found myself!"' After a decade making *beaucoup* bucks, he quit to go and really find himself. This led him to India, where he studied for seven years, leading him to where he is now, sleeping on my floor. He moves in with clients for as little as 24 hours and as many as 21 days. 'I never enter someone's life who isn't looking for change,' he says. Even if her editor sent him. That's karma, baby.

I sleep. I dream. I wake to find the dream looking at me from between his legs in a downward dog position on a yoga mat. What time is it? 'Five am. Sleep some more.' No problem. An hour later Cameron hands me a cup of warm water and takes me into the bathroom to instruct me in nasal douching, a morning practice that relieves allergies and sinus headaches, leaving you with a keener

sense of smell. In a cup, dissolve a pinch of salt in a few tablespoons of water. Pour a bit in your cupped hand, lean over, then snort it up your nostril, pause and blow it back out.

Next he teaches me meditative breathing and yoga postures. In lieu of coffee, he concocts a potion of turmeric, cardamom seeds, liquorice root, ginger and organic milk. The first sip is *yuck*. But by the bottom of the cup I can see Starbucks going out of business. Watching Cameron

pack up his wares, I think, No, don't leave! But his work is done. And his Spanish supermodel girlfriend is waiting for him at home. Just as I am about to go all Kathy Bates in *Misery* on him, he promises me he will be virtually in my life forever via his website, camerongoodhealth.com. Then he gives me a hug and a diet tip: 'It's better to eat a little of something that's not good for you than a lot of something that is.' That advice I can live with.

I stare out of the open window, watching him hail a cab. He looks up and calls to me, 'I should have given you an enema.' I yell back, 'My place or yours?'

Basti oil enemas are believed to relieve air imbalance ailments, which in my case would include anxiety, insomnia and dryness in the body.

'If you had more problems,' Cameron says, two days later, heating sesame oil over his stove, 'I'd add medicinal herbs to this.' Unlike water enemas, which induce a thunderous evacuation, the Ayurvedic variety uses a small amount of fluid that can be held internally until you decide you want to go. (I waited until I got home. I do, after all, have my pride.)

Cameron massages my head and stomach, then instructs me to turn onto my side. I'm fighting a flight response, but his professional composure and the fact that I have, in a way, already slept with him, keep me from bailing.

'He gave you an M&M-ema!' says my friend Michael, referring to my favourite food group. But chocolate is no longer on the menu. Caffeine is off, too. A month on, my fingernails are growing like crazy. I have no more breast tenderness, and I've stopped turning into a werewolf at night.

My head, my heart, my body do feel lighter. I woke up and looked out of my window today, and seeing the sun, the people, all the life outside was enough to make me go for a walk in Central Park. 'The only way you can change the world is to change yourself,' Cameron says. Look how he changed. I'm on a new path to becoming the Holly Lama. ■