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JANUARY 2015

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LOVE & SEX

VISION QUEST

LIZA MONROY was skeptical when her friends invited her to a “vision-boarding” party. But when she gave in to the New Age pastime, magical coincidences ensued

ONE COLD, DARK New York City night during a cold, dark time of my life, an invitation from “New Age Kassi” popped into my inbox. It read: “Join me for a Vision Board Party.”

Who the heck was New Age Kassi? The only Kassi I knew was my colleague at Columbia University, a whip-smart rhetoric professor and an intellectual at work on a book about a movement to depoliticize abortion. I was flabbergasted to find they were one and the same. Apparently Kassi was not as levelheaded as I’d thought. “The vision boards will project our incredible futures,” she wrote. “A

Pulitzer? Hotter sex? Bicoastal living? It’ll probably manifest. I’ll provide poster board, magazines, and glue.”

On my Brooklyn couch, I stared at the screen, aghast. As a 32-year-old skeptic and former magazine fact-checker, I question everything that cannot be tangibly proven. How could you stick photos from magazines on paper and expect things to happen? What *The Secret*-espousing demon fiend had possessed my rational friend? The “law of attraction” was pure New Age conjecture.

I told Kassi I would be out of town during her party so I wouldn’t be tempted to say what I *really* thought they could

GETTY IMAGES

do with those vision boards. What I most desired—a loving, committed relationship—was not something you could dial up with cutouts on paper. To say that my past relationships had not worked out would be an understatement. One ex-boyfriend drowned my computer in the bathtub when we broke up. The very notion that “The One” would show up because I wielded a glue stick was laughable.

A few months after her Vision Board Party, Kassi and I were sitting in a nail salon near Columbia. Exciting things were happening: She’d read a humor piece at an event with Sarah Silverman and Amy Schumer. She’d pasted “comedy’s heavy hitters” on her vision board, but I didn’t believe that had anything to do with it; she’d set goals and worked hard. A different connection startled me, though: Recently, she’d met the man of her dreams—also directly related to images from her vision board. *There’s absolutely no way*, I thought. It was only a coincidence.

But I told Kassi that not only would I make a vision board, I’d also host the next party. That way, when my own dreams didn’t “manifest,” I’d have proof that the entire dumb thing was a fluke. I e-mailed invitations, still shocked that I was doing it.

Fifteen friends spread out on the floor of my apartment the Sunday of Vision Board Party 2, surrounded by magazines, scissors, and construction paper. I marveled at the 30-somethings diligently working with kindergarten art-project supplies. I halfheartedly constructed my own board, pasting career (“A-list contributor,” “Nonfiction best seller”), lifestyle (beaches and palm trees galore, a house), and travel (more beaches) goals. I’d received a string of paper Tibetan flags in the mail as part of a donation request. I stuck those on the board, too, just because they looked nice.

A friend visiting from Brazil gave my board a once-over: “You no want mans?” he asked. “A man,” I corrected, paging through another magazine. I’d forgotten to add “love” images, even though that had been part of the point: to prove that Kassi’s “success” had been nothing more than coincidence. “Oh, look—here’s one now!” I cut out a smiling man holding a box, which I imagined as a present for me. That wouldn’t be so bad, especially if what’s inside the box are new shoes, size 6. And so ended Vision Board Sunday.

On Wednesday, I headed to my capoeira academy—I’d fallen in love with the Afro-Brazilian martial art—for a workshop. It was *batizado* week: seven days of classes taught by visiting guests, culminating in a graduation ceremony on Saturday, during which we capoeiristas would get our next-level belts. One of the visitors was Jason, a capoeira instructor from California. We had an immediate, easygoing rapport.

During class, Jason mentioned wanting to see the High Line, the converted elevated train track in Manhattan, so I offered to play tour guide afterward. As we walked the length of the park, watching traffic fly by from windowed viewing platforms, he described his town, Santa Cruz: beaches, nature, space. *Sounds like my vision board*, I thought. I had stashed it beneath a pile of papers on my desk, hidden out of sight. I was embarrassed to have the evidence of my experiment to disprove the New Agey concept. While I still thought the

whole thing was ridiculous, I couldn’t bring myself to throw the board away.

Spending time with Jason was the most fun I’d had in a while. He was funny, kind, intelligent, and handsome, an elementary school special-education teacher who taught capoeira in the evenings. He loved travel and dogs and lived near the beach. He was perfect—and oh-so-impractical. He left on Sunday, exactly one week after Vision Board Party 2. When he wrote the next day, “I hope I’ll get to see you again soon,” I tried to keep my excitement in check. He lived on the opposite coast and was

IT FELT LIKE A COSMIC JOKE, AS IF I HAD STEPPED OUT OF NEW YORK CITY AND DIRECTLY INTO MY VISION BOARD.

freshly out of a long-term relationship. But we started Skyping anyway, and after a month of virtual courtship, we met in the Midwest for a long weekend.

I didn’t need the board to tell me that this relationship was different, though the timing between making it and meeting Jason was uncanny. When I got home after my romantic weekend, I looked at it again. The “love” section was right next to all those beaches and palm trees. Had I “manifested” a Californian? I wondered if there might be something more to what I’d readily dismissed.

Since I had the fall semester off, I planned to visit Jason for three weeks in Santa Cruz before heading to a writing residency in Nebraska. But the day after I arrived in California, he proposed. When the residency ended a month later, I sublet my Brooklyn apartment for good and officially moved in with Jason. We’d known each other for only a few months, but neither had any doubts. It felt like a cosmic joke, as if I had stepped out of New York City and directly into my vision board. You can’t throw a rock here without hitting Tibetan flags—exactly like the ones I’d pasted on the board for no reason.

Now, my 2-year-old vision board is prominently displayed on the wall of our home office. I asked Jason what he thought of its resemblance to my life. “Just putting it on paper probably helps you focus on your goal,” he answered. “As far as finding me and moving to Santa Cruz—in the great wide world of coincidences, it’s pretty small.” This is part of why I love him: He always puts things in perspective. And, like me, he’s skeptical of what cannot be proven.

Still, I learned I didn’t have to buy a dream catcher and a wish crystal to have fun with what might actually be a practical way to distill dreams. Eventually, I confessed to New Age Kassi about boycotting her original party. “I was actively *upset* that you were making vision boards,” I said.

“As long as it’s not hurting anybody, I err on the side of belief,” she responded.

And I, on the side of doubt, but with one caveat. Yes, it’s crazy, but it seems that—even though I made the board to discredit the whole silly concept—maybe, just maybe, it worked anyway. **mc**

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QUEEN
COUNTRY

on Blake,
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new body

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CLASSICS
AR LONG

