

What kind of spouse do you want and what are YOU doing to become like that?



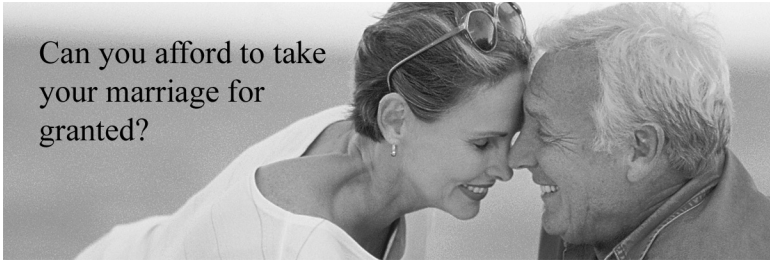
The Education of Rachel

Kendall was a 40 something investment specialist, and I was her hairdresser. She got her hair done every six weeks, her nails every three; and I did them both. She tipped well, which I appreciated. But the best part about Kendall, was that she listened to me. She really seemed to understand my problems. Usually as a hairdresser, I play the part of therapist. I listen to women go on about their kids, their mothers-in-law, their attempts to diet. Sometimes there's a juicy piece of gossip that involves another client of the salon, so it's not always a total bore. But with Kendall, it was different. I found myself opening up to her. She didn't seem to mind. If she did, I'm sure she would have told me. She wasn't afraid to speak her mind, when she actually spoke. She listened to me until one day. That was the day she taught me about myself.

My name is Rachel. I married Luke Walker (and no, his middle name is not Sky.) two years ago. We are both 29. He does computer work for a large company here in town. We don't have kids yet, and we're in no rush either. We met on a blind date. For him, it was love at first sight. For me, it was a month before I knew I was hooked. Tall, dark, handsome, thoughtful; a strong, quiet type. When we were dating, Luke was such a gentleman. Opening doors, letting me pick the movies, and stuff like

that. He was sweet. He brought me flowers sometimes, or he'd get my favorite ice cream (chocolate caramel nut), and sometimes he'd bring me lunch from my favorite Chinese place down the street. He isn't quite the talker that I am, and I think that's why we hit it off. As they say, opposites attract! We dated for about a year before he proposed, and were married six months later. Things were so great at the beginning. We got a cute apartment, bought nice furniture, we entertained friends, we went out to eat all the time, and I got the new car. Marriage wasn't the "big adjustment" everyone said it would be. It was exactly what I wanted: great guy, great apartment, great furniture, great car, great friends. Life was great! I was great, and I thought he was too. How quickly all that greatness changed.

Luke makes pretty good money at his job. Computer nerds always do. I do pretty well at the salon. I'm one of the top stylists, and my appointment book is always full. Money is not an issue to me, and that is right where Luke started changing things. I have a job where my clothes, hair, and accessories are my uniform. I like to stay updated, so I need to shop frequently. We also live in a big city, so the apartment isn't cheap. Luke wanted to live in the 'burbs, but I fell in love with this historic apartment building downtown. So, we live downtown. Like I said, we both make good money, so I didn't see the problem. About six months after we were married, Luke started complaining that I spend too much money. Did I really need another \$90 pair of jeans when I had a drawer full of them? He said I needed to cut back on my clothes, and that we needed to stop eating out. He said that since I insisted on living in an expensive apartment, and financing all the furniture, I needed to buckle down so we could pay it all off. Luke wants to save money to buy a house, and said we should set up a budget. He wasn't nice about it at all. I felt



Can you afford to take
your marriage for
granted?

like he was picking on me. It seemed like everyday, he would tell me I need to quit buying this or that, and that he should put me on an allowance. Excuse me...an allowance? I'm not 10 years old.

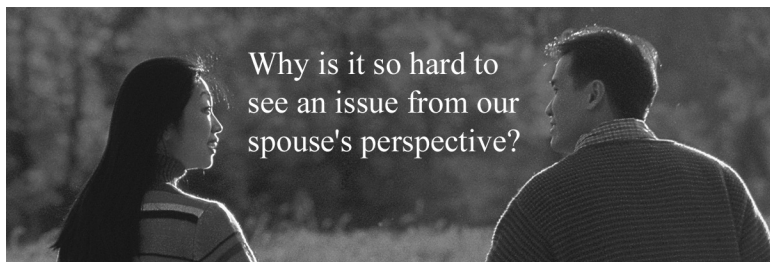
Since he was so into pointing out my 'faults', I started paying more attention to his. I said before he is a quiet type. That is the most annoying thing in the world. I want to talk things out. He makes a grand pronouncement, then won't talk it over. He doesn't listen to me. I try to explain things to him, and he won't listen. I told my best friend Kristin (she also works at the salon) about Luke's new money plan. She thought he was being ridiculous, and told him that to his face when he brought me lunch that afternoon. I love Kristin! When my mom asked me how things were going, I told her. She didn't say much, but didn't like that Luke was treating me with so little respect.

Then, Luke started working overtime. He said it was because of debt problems that we needed the extra money. Right. I think he doesn't want to be around me. I don't want to be around him either. All he does is talk about money, and I hate that. So, I hang out with Kristin and friends from the salon when he's working. They all think his money talk is stupid too. Now, I'm not saying that money isn't important. But, we're young, and we don't have a house, kids, and those kind of responsibilities yet, so why not enjoy ourselves?

Luke really started to get on my nerves. He is a neat freak for one thing. He wants everything in its place. I'm not a slob, but he is too neat. If the shoes aren't lined up in the closet, he will re-organize them. If the bedspread has a lump in the middle, he'll re-make the bed. I knew he was only doing that to 'show me' I was wrong, because they were my shoes he was lining up, and it was me who made the bed that wasn't perfectly smooth. I would work all day, then come home and clean, but it didn't seem good enough. There were other things too. He hadn't brought me flowers in a long time, and since Kristin told him off, he hadn't brought me lunch either. I missed having lunch with Luke. After listening to all that, Kendall suggested I make him a special dinner and tell him how I was feeling. So I did.

Luke was shocked to see a candle light dinner waiting him when he got home. He hugged me, and gave me one of *his* kisses. I emphasize *his* because they are like no other kiss I've ever had! I made his favorite; grilled shrimp scampi. He thanked me, told me how beautiful I looked, then asked how my day was. I talked about the girls at the salon, and their guy troubles. I talked about my clients, and that Meredith is pregnant with her second baby. Why she got pregnant again, when all she does is complain about the baby she already has, is a mystery to me. I talked for awhile before I realized I hadn't asked about his day. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "It was alright."

After dinner, I asked him to come and sit on the couch so we could talk. I told him that I had some things that I needed to tell him, things that had been bothering me lately. I started very calmly. I told him that I missed him, and that I was trying to do better with my spending habits. (I hadn't bought anything new in over a week.) I continued to tell him that I felt that he was disappointed with me, and that I knew he was sending me messages by fixing my



shoes in the closet, re-making the bed, etc.. I continued with my list (which detailed more things that annoyed me) for about 45 minutes. He didn't say a thing while I talked. He looked at the wall; nodding on occasion. When I was done, he was still looking at the wall. Since his quietness was one of his more annoying qualities, I found myself getting really mad the longer he just sat there not saying anything. Finally, I exploded, "WELL..." Then he looked at me. I saw sadness in his eyes. "It must be very hard for you to live with a person who is so awful," Luke finally replied. Why did he have to say something like that? I didn't say he was awful. I said he was annoying.

What came next felt like a giant slap in the face, though he never touched me. "I'm sorry. I'll try to do better." That was it. That was all he said. He didn't get mad, he didn't say a bunch of stuff about me that annoyed him. He just said he was sorry, then got up and went for a walk. The following Sunday we spent the day at his parents house. I sat with his mom on the patio while we ate lunch. I watched Luke as he threw the Frisbee with Josie, the family's golden retriever. She was fat, old, and limped, but she played Frisbee with Luke like she was a pup. It made me smile.

Lily, Luke's mom asked me how things were going. Another ally, I thought. I started down my list of complaints, then told her of our dinner and conversation

from a few days before. She nodded, looking at her salad, then to Luke, but said nothing. Must be a Walker trait.

Things stayed pretty much the same over the next several months. We had come to some kind of truce, but I wasn't exactly sure what that was. We just existed together, nothing bad, but nothing great. Luke was true to his promise to do better though. He didn't re-make the bed, and he left my shoes in a heap. All this time, Kendall kept listening to me. One day I was telling Kendall that I thought I was falling out of love with Luke. Things were boring, he wasn't the same guy he was when we were dating, and while he wasn't bad to me, things were stale, and I didn't think it was worth staying with him. Then it happened.

Her eyes narrowed at me, and she quietly, but firmly said, "Shut up." I looked stunned at her in the mirror. She stared right back with a look that pierced me. "What?" I said stupidly. "You heard me," Kendall replied. I spun her chair around to look at her properly. "I know what you said, I..." I started to reply but she cut me off. "You are the most selfish, spoiled, little girl I've ever known." Her tone was flat, soft, yet powerful. I'm sure my mouth was hanging open. Then, as she sat there staring at me, tears started flowing from her eyes with alarming speed. "You have no idea what you will be throwing away. You have a good husband. You haven't tried hard enough to make things better." What...? She had no idea what she was talking about.

"What do you know about it?" I snapped hotly. "Well, I've listened to you talk about Luke for what, three years now? You used to go on and on about how perfect he is, and now all you do is criticize him, belittle him, talk badly about him. It's no wonder you've fallen out of love with him. Did you ever really love *him* in the first place?"



How will thinking, “It will never happen to us” prevent it from happening to us?

She said the word “him” with a different tone. I sat down. Who was this woman, and why was she talking to me like this?

“Look,” she said. “I’m sorry for being so blunt. But really Rachel, you haven’t worked hard enough at your marriage to give it up yet.” “Oh, really?” I quipped back. Did she even have a husband? She quietly started, “You’ll never have a successful marriage if you can’t get past all these petty, stupid, little things you are always going on about.” She had my full attention. I couldn’t take my eyes off her face. The tears were still rolling. “I realize that no man is perfect,” she went on, “but neither are we.” “Has Luke ever listed your faults to you in the way you’ve done to him?” That stung, because I knew he hadn’t.

“I have a funeral to attend tomorrow.” Her statement caught me off guard. It had nothing to do with what she had just been saying. “You mentioned that when you came in,” was my response. “It’s my husband’s funeral.” Her voice was almost a whisper. My eyes widened. “He’d been fighting cancer for about four years now.” How could I not know this? I had seen her every few weeks for three years. Truth is, I never asked anything about her, and she never volunteered any information. I always started in with my own problems.

“Bart and I have been married for 25 years. I was young when he swept me off my feet.” Her face calmed as