

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



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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

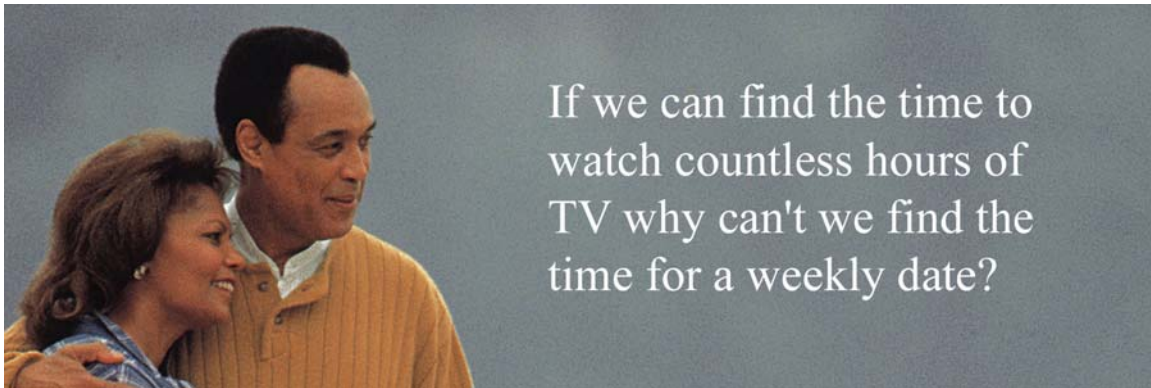
wanted to live in the 'burbs, but I fell in love with this historic apartment building downtown. So, we live downtown. Like I said, we both make good money, so I didn't see the problem. About six months after we were married, Luke started complaining that I spend too much money. Did I really need another \$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 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.

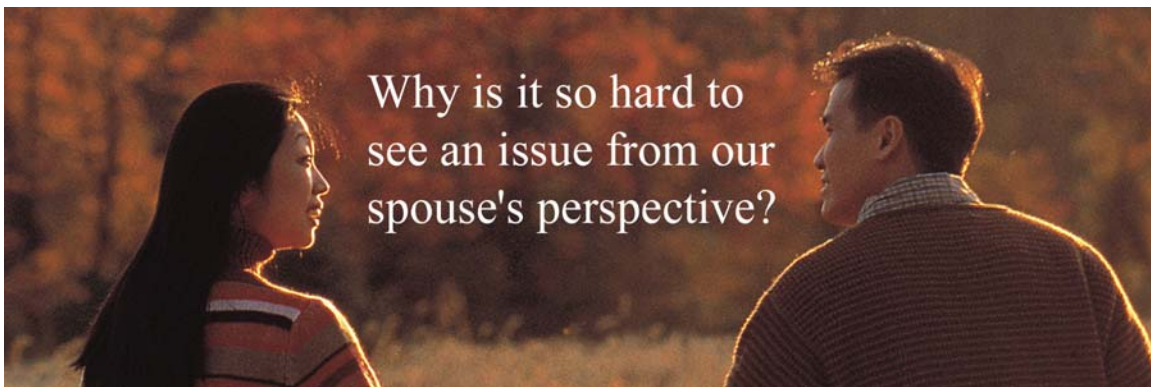
Things stayed pretty much the same over the next several months. We had come to some kind of truce, but I wasn't exactly sure what that was. We just existed together, nothing bad, but nothing great. Luke was true to his promise to do better though. He didn't re-make the bed, and he left my shoes in a 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?" 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 she reminisced. She was silent before continuing. "He was everything a girl could want: kind, gentle, a hard worker...much like your Luke. But there was always a quiet side that he wouldn't share. It bothered me a lot. Just like Luke's quietness bothers you." No wonder she seemed to understand me, she had been there. "One day, after being married for a few years, I talked to my mom. I cried, and wondered why Bart had been so wonderful, then had become someone I could hardly stand to be around." "My mom sat me up straight, and looked me straight in the eye with a look I'd never seen before; she was really mad." Kendall sat up in her chair, in demonstrative fashion.

"Kendall Jean Robbins," she announced with a strong southern accent, "you hush your mouth right now. Bart is not a perfect man, and if you thought so, you were mistakin'." I couldn't help smile at Kendall; I almost laughed outright. "But," Kendall continued in motherish voice, "he is a good man, with good qualities and that's why you fell in love with him." "You're spending so much time concerned with the little things he does that bother you, have you considered the things you're doin' that bother him?" Kendall let out a chuckle as she recalled her mother. "You stop lookin' for the bad in that man, and start lookin' for the good. You speak well of him in front of others, and start treatin' him like you did while you were courtin'. You do that, and he'll look like he did back then, only better." "Better?" I questioned. "Yes," Kendall said with a sly smile, and sliding into the accent again, "'Cause now you two ain't just courtin', you're married, and bein' married has a few more advantages!" We both let out a laugh, lessening the tension. "But even with advantages, love and marriage takes work. More work than you've been putting in." Kendall sat back.

"She was right, Rachel." Kendall got serious again, her cheeks glistening, "Bart was nowhere near perfect, and neither am I. But I took her advice, and it changed *everything*. I started remembering his good qualities, and along the way, I discovered

new things that made me love him even more. As I started changing the way I acted toward him, he suddenly became the man I fell in love with...only better!" "I realized that I wasn't giving him much of a reason to want to be with me, because of the way I was treating him." Her eyes were pleading with me to understand. "But things were better when we both worked at it. When we found out he had cancer, I was devastated. I love my husband deeply; I didn't want him to suffer. I didn't want him to die." I was choking up now. Kendall said in a pleading whisper, "You need to remember why you fell in love with Luke. Honestly Rach, are shoes, the bed, and all those other little complaints *worth it*? Look at how they have changed the way you feel about Luke." I felt a stab of shame as her words landed right where they were meant to land. My heart beat heavily as I considered it all. As I replayed the past two years in my mind, I saw that she was right. I hugged Kendall tightly. "I'm so sorry about Bart," I managed to choke out. "Thank you," she whispered. "Just don't give up. Marriage is a life long journey, not a destination. It will take both of you, together, to make it work." I finished her hair in silence.

Luke came with me to Bart Robbin's funeral. As I listened to the family speak about Bart and Kendall, their deep love for each other, their strong marriage, I knew that I wanted-- no-- I needed, a marriage like that. I turned and looked at Luke with tears in my eyes. We both had done and said things that damaged our relationship. But, with Kendall's words fresh in my mind, I was determined to make our marriage better. We stayed up all night talking after the funeral. I apologized to Luke for my part in creating the tension in our marriage. Luke hugged me fiercely; I didn't want him to let go. He apologized for his part in the tensions too. I told him what I needed from him, and he told me what he needed from me. Together, we recommitted ourselves to our marriage, and to each other. He started opening up and talking more; I complained less and listened more. We started making the bed together. We ate by candle light more, like tonight. It's our third anniversary; and you know, I'm more in love with Luke now than on our wedding day. I'm still Kendall's hair stylist, but now, I do a lot more listening.



Ounce of Prevention Worksheet

There is a story about a farmer who plowed his fields but never planted them. Reading this story and not implementing what you learned will get you the same result as the farmer who plowed but never planted.

Do you ever find yourself dwelling on your spouses faults?

The more you dwell on your spouse's faults the more faults you will find. As you find more faults your respect for your spouse decrease and feelings of contempt will increase. The longer you allow this cycle to continue the greater the damage to your marriage will occur.

The reality is that everyone has faults, including yourself. Even if you divorce your spouse you will end up simply trading in one set of faults for a different set of faults in your next relationship. The key to a happy marriage is to learn to live with your spouse just the way they are and not dwell on their faults.

This week if you notice a fault of your spouse's immediately write down five qualities that you admire about your spouse. Begin this exercise right now by writing down five positive qualities.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

As you dwell on your spouse's strengths the respect you feel towards your spouse will increase, contempt will decrease, and you will enjoy the fruits of a happy and healthy marriage.

There are some faults that should never be tolerated. Domestic violence is one of them. If you are the victim of domestic violence please contact a professional immediately.