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SAVAGE LOVE

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?
BY DAN SAVAGE

My husband and I are a straight couple in our early 50s, and we've been married for more than 30 years. We were raised to wait for sex till we got married—this was back in the early '80s—and we did. Our wedding night was pretty disappointing since neither of us knew what we were doing. He got off, but I didn't. We both assumed that there was something wrong with me, because he didn't have any problem coming, right? We were both raised to believe that sex was something men took from women, that it was difficult for women to orgasm, and that no woman wanted sex as much as a man did. We read books, we went to counseling, but nothing changed. This went on for a couple of decades. He's a great guy—funny, loyal, faithful, great dad to our kids—so I figured I was lousy in bed and I was lucky he put up with me. Recently, I got my hands on a vibrator. OH. MY. GOD. There's nothing wrong with me! Now I think my libido might actually be stronger than his. But even with what I now know about my sexuality, we have been unable to figure out how to get me to orgasm when we are together. I've suggested some milder forms of kink, but he isn't interested. I suspect we're just incompatible in bed, which has made me a fairly vocal opponent of the "waiting for marriage" garbage, much to my husband's consternation. He thinks it's so sweet that neither of us has ever had sex with someone else. So you can probably see my dilemma. Neither of us has ever been unfaithful, and neither of us is okay with being unfaithful—I know he isn't. Even though I'm intrigued by the idea, I don't think I could pull off the lying and deceit required to do it behind his back. We also live in a small town where it would be nearly impossible to have a discreet affair. I don't really want a divorce, because it means losing the entire life we've built together, which is no small thing. But when I think about never having good sex in my entire life, I can hardly stand it. What would you do?

Bored In Bed For An Unbearably Long Time

What would I do? I would be unfaithful, BIBFAULT.

And since there's no guarantee that I would click sexually with the first guy I fucked other than my husband—or the second guy or the third guy or the fourth guy—I would go right on fucking other guys until I fucked a guy who was spectacular in bed. [Please note: While "spectacular in bed" sounds like some sort of objective standard, it's actually a highly subjective and personal experience. One person's spectacular sex partner is another person's meh-to-traumatizing sex partner. So while BIBFAULT and her husband aren't a match—clearly—he has matches out there and so does she.]

I'm not telling you what to do, BIBFAULT, I'm just answering the question you posed: "What would you do?" If I were in your shoes, if I had suffered through three decades of subjectively lousy sex, if I were staring down the possibility of going to my grave without ever having experienced good-to-great sex (not even once!), I would cheat on my husband of 30 years. I would've cheated on him already, past tense, a decade or two ago and probably at regular intervals. [I also would've sued all those counselors who failed to suggest buying a vibrator when I complained about my difficulty achieving orgasm.]

But that's me, BIBFAULT. What should you do? I really couldn't tell you.

That's not true. I could tell you what to do. Telling people what to do is pretty much my fucking job. But in all honesty, I'm not sure what you should do. You say you're not okay with cheating, and I almost believe you—you wouldn't have written if you weren't okay with cheating on some level and/or seeking permission to cheat—and cheating would be logistically complicated, given your circumstances, and it would put everything you have with your husband, who you genuinely love, at risk. So I'm not going to tell you to cheat.

But I will tell you this: You may have an easier time not cheating—an easier time not going out there and actively seeking out sex with other men, an easier time not seizing the first opportunity to cheat that comes your way—if you give yourself permission to cheat if an opportunity to cheat discreetly and with minimal deceit comes along. Telling yourself it will never happen, that you'll never have good sex, means living in despair, and despair isn't good for individuals or marriages. But telling yourself that it might happen—but only if the planets have all aligned perfectly (you're out of town, it's someone you trust, you won't have to actively lie)—means living in hope, and hope is good for individuals and marriages.

And knowing that you can cheat when the right opportunity presents itself will make it easier for you to resist cheating—to resist doing something reckless—when the wrong opportunities present themselves.

My wife, who is 35, had sex with a 25-year-old neighbor when she was barely 15 years old. (It was two days after her 15th birthday.) I should say "was raped by," not "had sex with." She insists it was consensual, claims she wasn't traumatized by it, and is actually Facebook friends with the man who raped her. I think this is unhealthy. How do I get through to her?

Totally Unacknowledged Trauma

I had sex with someone in their mid-20s when I was 15—I had sex with two mid-20s someones at the same time when I was 15—and I regard that encounter as consensual and I wasn't traumatized by it. So you can take this question to some other advice columnist, TUT, or you can stop policing your wife's feelings about her own sexual history.

I'm a merrily married straight woman with an amazing husband and what was once a thriving sex life. Recently, my husband had what was supposed to have been a routine surgical procedure. He ended up having basically every complication possible, short of dismemberment and death. I had no problem being his caregiver during this time, but I'm now having trouble mentally reigniting the erotic spark. He's recovered and interested, and I want to be intimate again, but I find myself thinking that he looks pale or that position X might be too much for him, and it's very difficult to get in, and remain in, the mood for sex. How do I turn off caregiver mode and get back to being a sexual partner?

Missing My Sex Life

The next time you're having sex and that little voice in your head says, "This position might be tough on him," MMSL, ignore it and power through. It may not be particularly fulfilling sex for you—you may not be fully present and in the moment—but the quickest way to prove to yourself that your husband isn't too fragile for sex (or too pale for it) is to have sex a few times. After you've seen with your own eyes that sex didn't break him (and may have brought some color back to his skin!), that little voice in your head—the voice of the caretaker he needed when he was sick but doesn't need now—should fade away.

On the Lovecast, Dan and gay evangelical Christian author Matthew Vines scrap it up.