

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

**ONCE A FROG,
ALWAYS A FROG?**
Or can you make him
over into a prince?

My friend Emily realized she had to do something about her mate's appearance the day he came to pick her up at her office and was immediately directed to the mail room, along with another young man who was delivering lunch. Most of us don't need this kind of evidence to convince us that our partners need redesigning—we have the evidence of our own eyes, which tells us at first glance that we haven't been quite as lucky in life as Joanne Woodward.

If you'd like to alter your partner's looks so that you will no longer be tempted to tear off all his clothes for reasons other than sex, the first thing to do is assess your chances of success. Some men care so little about how they look that they don't mind being redecorated. They don't notice if you take off all their clothes and re-dress them before they go out, and they don't take offense if you suggest finding a barber shop where the patron next to them isn't sitting in a little red car. There are other men who do resent being tampered with, probably because they've put a lot of effort into their appearance—if you can call it that. If your partner fits the latter category, chances are you've got a sow's ear on your hands for life.

Should you conclude that your partner might be willing to give up some of his long-held habits of dress, like wearing black socks under his sandals, the next thing to do is determine priorities. Ask yourself if it's more important to get him to (1) shave a little more often than you do, (2) take the earring out of his left lobe, or (3) swear never again to wear anything that leaves his belly button exposed. Don't do everything at once. Even the most malleable man is liable to get annoyed if, within a twenty-four-hour period, you switch his wardrobe, change his hair, buy him a collection of grooming products and suggest a nose job.

Priorities were easy for my friend Sue. When she first started dating her husband, his wardrobe consisted of a couple of T-shirts advertising spiritual redemption through herbal tea, a pair of dungarees so torn that she assumed he'd worn them while escaping through barbed wire, and running shoes that looked as if they might once have belonged to Jesse Owens. "I knew right away," says Sue, "that I would have to expend almost as much energy on getting him to dress himself as I would on getting him to marry me."

After you've decided what to tackle first, decide on an effective strategy. There's the

"Whatever happened to my red satin shirt?" technique, wherein a particularly offensive piece of attire disappears from your partner's drawer and you put on an innocent look and suggest that (1) it never came back from the laundry, (2) it never came back from the cleaner's or (3) it never came back from the movies. You can use this technique just so often before your partner begins to wonder why the cleaner seems to lose only *his* clothing.

A longer-lived technique involves introducing your partner to the finer points of dress and grooming. This is what my friend Janice did. When she first met her husband, he dressed so drably that he was invisible by candlelight. She went out and bought several men's fashion magazines, took him around to trendy boutiques, and assured him that statistics show that wearing bright colors would not make him more vulnerable to criminal assault. Her urgings must have worked, she says, because nowadays if she goes to the ladies' room at the movies, she can find him again in the dark.

When my friend Annie first met her lover, his hair looked as if he cut it himself with nail clippers. By pointing out other, more handsomely coiffed men, she made her partner aware of his shortcoming, especially with

the reinforcement of sentences like, "That guy doesn't look as if a helicopter landed on *his* head."

Be sure to offer copious praise when your partner shows signs of progress, no matter how small. Say encouraging things like, "I'm glad to see you're finally wearing a tie that doesn't look like you bought it at Pee Wee Herman's Playhouse." Or, "When you shine your shoes like that, it diverts attention away from your bald spot."

Finally, be aware that there is an element of risk in your efforts. For one thing, your good offices will probably make your partner more attractive to others besides yourself. My friend Kathy spent a lot of time taking her boyfriend shopping at her favorite unisex boutique, and when they broke up, he went back by himself and started dating the saleswoman. Also, it's possible that if *you* tell him to stand up straight all the time, he'll decide he might just as well move back home to his mother.

Still, redesigning your partner is probably a good idea, and one way to make sure that if every day you spend together feels like a holiday, it won't be Halloween.

by Bette-Jane Raphael

ABSOLUTELY.



*Can you
make it to
your next
PayDay?*