

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

HOW COUPLES LOSE FRIENDS FAST

Yes: mis-matchmaking.

Shortly after my partner and I moved in together, he asked if I would fix up one of his colleagues with one of my single friends. I agreed. The resulting date was a disaster on the scale of Chernobyl. My partner's friend, it seemed, had just broken up with his longtime girlfriend, was in a terrible depression and was eating to forget. The morning after their date, my friend reported that he had spent the entire evening recounting the ups and downs of his erstwhile relationship and eating everything in her apartment, down to a packet of yeast. That night did even less for either of their social lives than it did for my life with my partner—a temporary chill set in when I told him that if I wanted to break up my friendships, I could do so perfectly well without his help.

We are not the only couple whose attempted matchmaking sometimes seems like attempted murder. Consider Nancy and Les. While some people feel they have a mission to end world

hunger, Nancy feels she has a mission to end world singleness. Les swears that she has even made up charts listing the names of unattached women friends in one column and those of known bachelors in another, and that she spends whole evenings poring over these lists and musing about various possible matches. Will sophisticated Emily go for Les's friend, John, she wonders? Or was it John who once showed up at their annual Halloween party wearing nothing but a diaper? Maybe Emily would prefer the friend Les affectionately calls Dirty Harry, she speculates, until she remembers that the name is both affectionate *and* accurately descriptive. As she sits pairing their friends up, two by two, Les can be heard in the background telling her there's no food, and the world doesn't need another Noah.

Janice and David are an indefatigable team when it comes to matchmaking. Their efforts are so extensive and well

known that one male friend of David's claims he has met more women at their house than at the hair salon where he works. Another, who came to dinner and found Janice's widowed grandmother there on a visit, had to be reassured that this was *not* a fixup. Their matchmaking so far has met with little success. Although a good friend of Janice's went out four times with David's college roommate, they subsequently stopped seeing one another under slightly acrimonious circumstances after David's former roommate suggested they make all their future dates cook-ins. That's when Janice's friend suggested they make all their future dates in the past, and after that, they both stopped talking to David and Janice.

When my friend Gil is asked if he and his wife ever play matchmaker, he says cheerily, "Oh, yes, Sue does. She's ruined several lives already." According to Sue, he isn't exaggerating. Her matchmaking record is a study in calamity. Directly after going on dates arranged by Sue, one fellow turned alcoholic, another decided to enter psychotherapy, her cousin said she had decided not to date anymore for awhile, and a stockbroker friend of Gil's gave them a bad stock tip. Undeterred by her dismal record, she is forever prying into the relevant statistics of any new men in Gil's office. A typical evening conversation at their house might go something like this:

Sue: Did you meet the new accountant?

Gil: Yes.

Sue: Is he nice?

Gil: Yes.

Sue: Is he good-looking?

Gil: No.

Sue: Is he married?

Gil: No.

(Pause)

Sue: When you say he's not good-looking, do you mean not good-looking like Michael Tucker, or not good-looking like a gorilla?

Josh and Sally would *like* to fix up their unattached friends, but are forever fouling up. They keep forgetting important details about people, and once paired up an aspiring drummer with a young woman who had chronic, inflammatory ear infections. Another time they matched a person who had several cats with one who had several allergies. Their matches have resulted in no marriages, but quite a few minor medical emergencies.

Stan and Marcia are the only people I know who've ever actually succeeded in matching up two of their friends, and in their case the matchmaking was entirely unintentional. Marcia smashed their car into a vehicle belonging to their next-door neighbor and sent the woman to a mechanic friend of Stan's for repairs. He gave her a paint job *and* a snow job and married her six months later.

Maybe, when it comes to successfully fixing up one's friends, the secret is to have the disaster occur *before* the date.

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