

I'm willing to buy a little help in finding true love



Tracy Nesdoly
Object of Desire

Money may not be able to buy happiness but I've always found it can buy something so close to happiness (like nice trips and good bags) it doesn't matter. Certainly money is now being called upon to buy you love.

Newspapers lately are rife with stories of agencies set up to connect people, all claiming vast success at helping people hook up meaningfully. It's Just Lunch is a growing operation with annual revenue of more than \$30 million (U.S.). It has 70-odd franchises already and plans to expand all over the world; websites like match.com and lavalife are reportedly runaway successes and business darlings.

Being single in the middle years is a bit of a challenge, if coupledom is what you want. You know all the people you know, you've met all the friends of your friends, you know the guys from work, so how do you inject new blood into the mix?

I have usually met my mates through the job, one way or another. As a reporter this was relatively easy, in that the interview process allows for an interview process. I covered fashion and met the owner of a retail chain; I covered courts and

crime and met a lawyer (though I could have as easily hooked up with a criminal, that's the sort of wisdom I have); I joined a PR company and met a new recruit... I know all the rules about fishing off the company dock, but where else do you meet people and get to know them? High-school sweethearts are met in high schools; once you're grown up you pretty much meet people on the job, or through the job, or through friends.

I've been lucky enough to have met Mr. Right oh, a hundred times, and each time he turned out to be merely Mr. Right Now. I'm sort of jaded about the whole love thing; however, when a friend suggested I try Equal Chemistry, a new company that promises a love connection, I thought in the spirit of careful research for gentle readers, I should do it.

Tory Howat started Equal Chemistry in 2004 after deciding to turn her knack of knowing who would love whom into a business. She's a matchmaker, one of those women who always has a great guy for you to meet.

I have a fear of corporate dating after watching so many friends of mine dash their hearts on the shoals of match.com or jdate or lavalife, rushing off to have coffee with people they've corresponded with by email and returning home horribly disappointed or breathlessly hopeful for the call that doesn't happen. And, there's evidence of a fairly small pool of eligible bachelors out there — some of the men my friends

have been meeting are those I've already vetted, so to speak. Sadly, it would appear the same guys are still single, still trolling.

Tory promises something else. The focus of her business is fitness: those people who are serious about sport and training (therefore have something in common right away), who are likely doing really well in business, and who as a result don't have a lot of spare time (what with working out and working) to meet new people.

As I am a runner, I qualified a little bit for the matchmaking talents of Tory. When she agreed to take me on, I had to commit to an interview with her, in person, which took a couple of hours. This is the essence

My matchmaker is so perfect you want to hate her but she's just so darn nice

of her approach in a sense — you are paying for her insight, her sense of you, and her connections.

Tory herself is a great advertisement for her services. She's perfect, a tall, slim, blond, happily married yummy mommy who went to all the right schools, knows all the right people, and no doubt got a pony for her birthday at some point. She's one of those people you'd love to hate but can't because she's so darn nice. In other words, Tory is successful at Life and she's willing to share.

We settled in for our interview

and I can safely say that Tory now knows more about me than most of my friends and certainly my family. What's more, in the course of our interview it became clear that I would love to lose 10 pounds and hike up the workouts, adding cross training and weights to the regime, and Tory whipped off the names of a terrific nutritionist (Linda McCharles, who is 6 feet tall, gorgeous and reed-like, therefore also a great advertisement for her particular services) and a trainer whom I have yet to meet but is surely the ticket to success if Tory knows anything about fitness, and she does.

"The questionnaire is a big help but really, I'm most successful when I rely on intuition," says Tory. "Whenever I met someone I like who is single, my mental rolodex starts going. I've been doing this for 10 years, and have made a lot of successful

introductions. I also know how important fitness is and I understand people who make it a part of their life, and they need a partner who respects that." She met her own husband on a run, just after he completed an Ironman triathlon and she finished a marathon, so who am I to argue with success.

She has three people in mind for me right off the bat and within mere days I am off meeting candidate (shall I say victim?) number one, a man we shall call David, whom I meet for lunch one freezing cold day.

We meet at Bonzai, a sushi res-

taurant near his place of work. I love it, it's a fabulous looking place and the food is great. David showed up and is as promised, fit and attractive and successful.

He has a really sweet face and something that appeals to me even more, a terrific sense of style rare in a man without a woman in his life. He showed up in a perfect, sleek pinstripe suit and a purple gingham-check shirt, a rare combo that may sound odd but was strikingly good. I place inordinate value on things like this, I appreciate the creative talent it takes to look that good, and am thinking so far, Tory is a genius.

It transpires over lunch that David finds me deeply resistible. If I were to guess, I'd say I am too much of a muchness for him, not sweet and refined enough. My tales of my past life, covering beheadings and violent rapes, leave him rather chilled. Understandable I guess but still, isn't this more interesting than describing how my till didn't balance out at the end of the day until I remembered the \$20 the other checkout girl took? But it seems "interesting" will only take you so far in life.

I felt oddly sad by the end of lunch, with its "okay, so, 'bye" result. I wondered how my friends deal with failed Internet dates, which don't have a Tory at the end of it with whom to commiserate.

This is where Tory really shines. We talked about the meeting and rather than "how did you mess this up, he's per-

fect" which I was fearing, it was all about what wasn't quite right so she can nail it next time. I hung up the phone feeling way prettier and more powerful, ready for the next date.

There are two others lined up for me. One man sounds lovely if a little irritated that I wasn't able to call him back for two weeks due to stressful meetings and business trips. Again, Tory was the conduit who smoothed things over and explained all this, and he and I are due to meet soon.

There's another man in the wings, one Tory feels is my future husband, who is vastly busy with a merger right now, though if email is any indication, he's funny and affectionate and will certainly be a friend if nothing else.

As for David, lo and behold, he's on his way to becoming a friend, too. We're planning to meet for a drink later this month at a bar he likes that sounds really fun, and one of the very few bars in this city where I've not been. I like that he is in the world and knows these things, and I'm looking forward to seeing him again to catch up on some of the stuff we talked about over lunch.

Maybe money can't buy me love. It can buy me like, and that's close enough.

If you want some of the Tory treatment, check out www.equalchemistry.com

Tracy Nesdoly's column appears every two weeks. Write to her at tn@tracynesdoly.com