

Matchmaker, Matchmaker

Now that I'm in a great relationship myself, I want exactly the same thing for my best friends.

One of my two best friends already has a fabulous boyfriend who gets along great with J. My other best friend—let's call her Katie—mostly wouldn't hang out with us because she felt like the "fifth wheel." So then I felt bad even talking about how much fun we'd had later.

There was an obvious solution to the problem: all I had to do was set Katie up with one of J's friends so we could all hang out together. Brilliant, right?

There were just a couple of minor glitches.

First, Katie outranks all of J's close friends. (It's a simple fact). On the periphery, however, there was this one guy who seemed like he had promise. I could see bits of glitter shining through his dusty exterior and knew that with a little pressure from the right girl, this lump of coal could become a full-fledged diamond.

The second glitch was that J refused to play along. He said that if the set-up didn't work out, things would get awkward. J tends to a glass-half-empty kind of guy ("A realistic," he says), whereas I am an optimist ("A romantic," he says). My theory was that if it *did* work out, two people could be happy together. Besides, we're all adults. How bad could it be?

Since J wouldn't help me throw these two potential soul mates together, I did what any confirmed optimist would do: I staged the accidental encounter. (Well, accidental for J's friend. Katie would never have forgiven me if I hadn't given her enough notice to get her hair and nails done.) One Saturday afternoon when the guys were bowling, Katie and I stopped by the alley to say hello. We were basically in the neighborhood anyway.

J was grumpy at first but even he couldn't deny that Katie and his pal totally hit it off. The pheromones were so thick the bowling pins were falling over.

And so we were six—three happy couples hanging out. It was even more fun than I expected.

For exactly two weeks.

That's when J's friend's glittery bits disappeared. "Coal" criticized Katie's flamboyant hair, although she'd had a purple streak in it the night they met, and he liked it then. He made fun of her fashion sense, when everyone knows Katie's cutting edge. The last straw for me came when Coal discouraged Katie from trying out for the Dunfield's show choir. Now, Katie knows she's never going to win *American Idol*, but if the girl wants to perform, her boyfriend should back her 100 per cent.

I can't even describe how upset I was when I realized that I'd set my best friend up with a jerk. At first, I couldn't tell if Katie knew it, and I worried she'd succumb to his stupid put-downs. I lay awake imagining her on her wedding day, all mousey and subdued because Coal had snuffed out her spark.

I knew I had to get up the nerve to tell her Coal is unworthy, even though I normally have a policy about dissing my friends' boyfriends.

J wasn't exactly sympathetic: "That's what you get for messing in someone else's love life," he said. Still, he likes Katie and I could tell he felt bad that his friend was treating her like crap.

If I had a friend who behaved like Coal, I'd cut him or her off immediately. But guys are different. They compartmentalize. J likes Coal because the guy's a good basketball player and fun at a party. He doesn't have to like every aspect of someone's personality to be friends.

So it was up to me to have the talk with Katie, and when I did, we were both relieved. It turns out she'd only put up with Coal's shabby behavior as long as she did because of J. Once she knew I was behind her, she dumped his grimy caboose immediately. Being a class act, Katie broke up with him face to face and graciously. Coal's less classy response: "You'll never meet someone else like me again." Katie and I sincerely hope that is true.

I hoped Coal would run back to the pit he crawled out of. Instead, he started hanging around MORE, all bitter and sullen, dissing Katie whenever he could. And so we came full circle, with Katie refusing to join us again. That's when J drew the line. Without any prompting from me, he told Coal not to come around until he cooled off.

In the end, it is awkward. J's mad at me because he had to put Coal in a time out, and because the rest of his crew are giving him grief about putting "the wife" (i.e., me) ahead of his friends.

So I hereby retire as a matchmaker. When friends are involved, it's just too risky. Instead, I'll let Katie find her own perfect match and cheer her on from the sidelines, where I belong.