



ILLUSTRATION BY RAFFI ANDERIAN/TORONTO STAR

In recent years, she says, more never-married twenty- and thirtysomethings — too busy and too transient to meet on their own — have discovered match-making. There's also more of a high-end market now. She's begun a deluxe executive service, starting at \$10,000, that's precisely honed for clients with no time for hit-and-miss dates.

Claramunt and other matchmakers sell themselves on the personal touch. She interviews all her clients in their homes, she says, and turns down 7 to 10 per cent of them. They're not up to standards, such as the reject who cursed and snapped his fingers for his maid.

At Equal Chemistry, matchmaker Tory Howat is downright picky: only those aged 30 to 50, successful in a career and physically fit — either competitive athletes or at least highly active. No couch potatoes need apply.

"It's why I meet everybody," says Howat, 38, a runner in training for next year's Iron Man. "Someone who jogs once a week won't do. It's not the same personality type. I'm just listening to

what my database wants."

But even among chosen clientele, sticky situations occur. After a date, a matchmaker gets feedback from both sides. One may be enamoured, the other dismissive — a diplomatic standoff. "I'll just say, 'Let's move on,'" Howat says.

Sometimes, patterns emerge. One young woman kept interrogating her dates. "I felt I was in the precinct with a

light over my head," wrote one guy. Claramunt told the woman to relax and have fun.

"Nice guy, horrible haircut," was the consistent word on one of Howat's clients. She took him to her stylist and his love life perked up.

Other problems run deeper, turning the matchmaker into quasi-therapist. "My husband jokes I'm borderline Equal Chemistry and Dear Tory," says

Howat, who's done her share of hand-holding over late-night phone calls.

"I'm working on a tough one now," Kates says. "Basically, he wants his old girlfriend back. I can't just say, 'Honey, she's gone.' I keep encouraging him to broaden what he's looking for."

When one female client complained that the man acted too forwardly, Kates tactfully went over dating etiquette with him.

At Soulmates Inc, a Jewish match-making service, founder Eve Potok says she doesn't change people, just accommodates them. For instance, she wouldn't suggest a make-over for an untidy woman. "Probably some schlep-py guy would do just fine."

For those clients waiting for their next arranged date, there's heightened hope that this could be it. "I'm cautiously optimistic," says a 35-year-old lawyer who liked his five matches but is still looking. "You become jaded by my age, but then the romantic side kicks in. You think, 'Could this be my last first kiss?'"

You never know. There are those fairy tale endings.

Remember Bachelor Number 1? His love match with the blonde was mutual. "When I saw him, I had this feeling, he looks like he could be my husband. It freaked me out," says the woman, whose mother enrolled her with the matchmaker as a Christmas present. They married 7½ months after the first meeting and have two young children.

How did Claramunt know? It was more than their similar backgrounds, values and goals, she insists. "It was a feeling I had from both of them," says the matchmaker enigmatically. "It's an intangible." Case closed.