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Robert Cribb

Among life's seemingly inescapable social prisons lies the friend zone.

To the aspiring romantic, finding oneself contained inside its fortified confines with an intoxicating woman represents hope ensnared.

But you only have yourself to blame for wandering aimlessly into the warm, welcoming Venus Fly Trap of the friend zone with all of your well-intentioned kindnesses, 24/7 availability and platonic acts of service.

Unwittingly, you transformed yourself from a potential suitor into a surrogate girlfriend.

Your gestures of empathy were, to her, signs of your sexually neutered geniality.

So now, here you stand, mesmerized by the idea of the two of you in a place far different than where you are.

And there she is, oblivious to your prospects beyond that of a male "bestie."

"The friend zone is the swampland of relationships," says April Masini, a professional dispenser of relationship advice ([AskApril.com](http://AskApril.com)). "I get numerous questions from readers...asking how to get out of the friend zone."

Her advice is to – ideally – avoid getting into the friend zone in the first place.

"Many men, especially young men, see the friend zone as preferable to facing possible rejection in asking a woman out on a date."

Translation: Time to grow a pair, take the rejection if it comes, and understand that it frees you from the torment of braiding her hair while talking about boys.

If it's already too late and you're a regular invitee to girls' night out, here's the question: Is escape into the promised land of love possible after you've been categorized as pal?

After extensive consultation, I have promising news to report.

The chasm between pal and lover need not be seen as a barrier, says David Falcone, professor of psychology at [LaSalle University](http://LaSalle University) in Philadelphia.

"It is valuable to consider the contrary," he says, "that a period of friendship which is not contaminated by the usual ritual of dating creates the perfect foundation for a close and honest, loving relationship."

The "friends first" theory has, of course, been culturally enshrined in story and song.

Countless romantic comedy plots are founded on the old yarn about the single male and female protagonists who consult each other on their mutual string of failed romances, only to realize as violins crescendo in a final scene, that they were meant for each other all along.

But how exactly do you execute the switch to more-than-friends?

First, stop hanging out in groups and accepting friend invitations.



For famous friends Ross Geller (David Schwimmer), left, and Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston), the friend zone was a neverending source of angst.

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Crank up the flirtation. Invite her to Saturday night dinners. Show up with flowers, hold the door open, and look good, experts advise.

It worked for my pal David.

Like a panting, homeless puppy, he befriended Patricia in university.

He chauffeured her around town, listened to her daily troubles, escorted her through endless coffee meetings and did her homework.

Then – with some assistance from the lads – he kicked himself in the ass for failing at his real mission to become her boyfriend.

So he applied his game face, took her to a fancy dinner and proclaimed his affections.

“I’ll admit the first kiss was a bit like kissing your sister. But then hormones kick in and take over.”

They’re now married with two kids.

“Be prepared to sell yourself,” says Atlanta-based relationship therapist Joyce Morley. “Be prepared to share at least five reasons with your friend as to why your friendship should move to romance. She is going to want to know.”

Devising a personalized infomercial pitching your romantic value may seem like a lot of work. But remember, your soft-sell is what got you here.

But even with a persuasive case, it could still go either way.

“If you push, you may lose both the friend and the potential for a relationship,” says Tina B. Tessina, a California-based psychotherapist and author of [The Unofficial Guide to Dating Again](#).

Any signs of discomfort from her should prompt a full retreat.

Never mention your lovelorn pathos again and don’t get jealous when she dates other guys, Tessina advises.

My input: Good friggin’ luck with that.

I say pull the plug and run away as fast as you can.

Find other friends.

Try men.

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