

TORN IN TWO

Loving two men at once inevitably means having to make an agonising decision. Who do you choose – or should you walk away from both? By Carla Galitz

Who should Bella choose? This is the question the *Twilight* saga revolves around

– and it's difficult not to get swept away by this fanciful romance. You are either for Team Jacob or Team Edward....

But as much as love triangles make riveting film fodder, they are usually a great deal less romantic and more painful in reality. There's no denying that you are betraying both loves – and possibly yourself. How do you decide who is the right man for you – or whether you are better off on your own for now?

YOUR DOUBLE LIFE

Madeleen*, 29, a financial planner in Cape Town, can't choose between her former boyfriend, Louis*, and the new man in her life, Gavin*. 'I had been with Louis for seven years when I broke up with him – he wanted to marry me but that would have meant giving up my career and moving to his farm. Two months later I realised I'd made the biggest mistake of my life and asked him to take me back. But he wouldn't, as he was worried I'd resent him in the future. I cried every day for a year. I was so angry with myself for losing the love of my life.'

She eventually fell in love with a colleague, Gavin. 'Louis was also in a new relationship but when he found out about Gavin he told me he missed me. A few months later he dumped his girlfriend.'

'When we met up again, I realised that my feelings for him still ran deep and, until recently, I've been seeing him behind Gavin's back.'

'I just can't get to the point where I'm willing to break up with Gavin, because he's better for me in many ways. But I really believe Louis is my soul mate. The guilt is terrible. My problem is that I don't know who's the right one for me. Louis and I have a great history but if it weren't for him I'd probably be engaged to Gavin already. I've now told Louis to leave me alone but, in my heart, I really feel he's The One.'

Then there's Devashree*, 28, an insurance broker in Durban, who had been with her boyfriend Anand* for more than 13 years when she fell in love with Dev*. 'About four years ago Anand and I hit a very rough patch in our relationship. That's when I met Dev – we just connected immediately. We were platonic friends for six months but things progressed and I was soon lying, sneaking around and cheating on my boyfriend.'

'I've attempted to break it off with Dev many times but it has never worked. While I love Anand, I am nowhere near being *in* love with him. I'm attracted to Dev in every single

way – he excites and captivates me. I don't know whether I love him but I have no willpower when it comes to him.... I just don't know who to choose.'

CRUSH(ED)

It's certainly not uncommon for a woman to find herself loving two men, says Joanna Kleovoulou, a Johannesburg clinical psychologist and director of Bella Vida Centre Bedfordview. The reason she is drawn to two men is often that she has grown apart from her long-term partner; now she can't decide between them because each satisfies desires the other doesn't. Conversely, in both relationships certain needs go unfulfilled. She wants both men for what they bring to her life.

'Stereotypically, women seek emotional comfort and men seek physical comfort when they experience an unmet need or a void,' explains Kleovoulou. 'These roles are changing, however, and some women have a need for the thrill of passion and sex outside their partnership.' While revenge can occasionally be the stimulus, many women turn to another man because they feel lonely and neglected at home. They seek affirmation that they're still desirable and attractive.

Whatever the motivating factor, Johannesburg clinical psychologist Thuraisha Moodley says that it is unlikely that both men are loved with equal intensity. 'You may feel more for your new partner because it's a newer relationship that's still in the "honeymoon" phase, and while you may be cognisant of why you chose to be in the older relationship, you may not feel it on the emotional level any longer. But the original relationship is usually based on reality, whereas your crush on the new man could be due to idealism and enchantment.'

An emotional or physical affair is thrilling thanks to its illicit nature but once the instant gratification wears off and you reflect on your actions, you're faced with remorse, guilt and self-loathing. 'You could ▶



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be in total conflict with your beliefs and value system,' says Moodley. 'Of course your primary defence would be to blame your partner for the situation.'

This roller coaster of emotions can cause psychosomatic symptoms such as insomnia, headaches and even ulcers. You could also experience wild mood swings ranging from despair to manic excitement, says Kleovoulou.

You may have tried to sever ties with the 'other man' only to find that, despite your best intentions, you are hooked on the attention and excitement he brings to your life. 'You may not have resolved the issues in your primary relationship,' explains Kleovoulou, 'so the reasons you sought solace outside your relationship are still present. Then, each time you attempt to cut ties with the other man but allow him back into your life, you perceive yourself as weak and the self-loathing begins again, perpetuating the vicious cycle.'

YOUR CHOICE

Until you understand the real reasons why you were open to an illicit relationship, you will continue to be drawn to a dual love life. 'This will invariably have a negative impact on your original relationship – it may turn into something that you are both just existing in, while your new partner may want more over time if he is unattached. You may then be forced to choose,' says Moodley.

But how do you choose? The most effective way is to put your true thoughts and feelings on paper.

But don't make it a list of pros and cons – Moodley suggests creating a journal focusing on your original relationship. 'Include how you met, the qualities you fell in love with, how you saw your future together. Then evaluate how either of you diverged from this path. Also reflect on the real reasons you chose to be with him. For example, perhaps it's his character and warmth, or the emotional or financial security he provides. Look at whether this fits in with who you are right now and how you see your life going forward. Then create a journal about your new relationship.... Your decision should find you.'

If you decide to rebuild your primary relationship, it's going to take honesty. 'Both of you are responsible for making your relationship space sacred again. Understand what your personal voids and values are and learn how to stretch to meet the other's needs. Bring back the romance and fun, and use this opportunity to rediscover your partner,' says Kleovoulou.

If you choose your new love, know that you will have to face any unresolved inner conflict, and that the same dynamics you faced in your previous relationship will probably present themselves again. 'Often suspicion sets in when needs are not being met in the new relationship – one of you may worry that the other is cheating again. Your infatuation may crumble and you will be faced with the inevitable reality and challenges of a new relationship,' says Kleovoulou.

If, when evaluating the qualities you love in each person, you find that the fulfilment of your needs is split between them, it could be that neither is right for you, Moodley says. 'There's nothing stopping you from walking away from both people.'

'It may be important to be on your own and work on yourself. Once you're happier within, the person who'll complement you should be drawn into your life.' □

* NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED

Cinematic love triangles

LOVE TRIANGLES MAKE FOR GRIPPING MOVIES. HERE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVOURITES...



1 LEAP YEAR: A New York woman (Amy Adams) decides to propose to her boyfriend while he's in Ireland. During her trip there, she meets an innkeeper (Matthew Goode) – there's instant chemistry but she fights it, as he's everything she thinks she doesn't want. Only once she has returned to New York to marry her boyfriend does she realise she loves the Irishman....



2 MATCH POINT: A former tennis pro (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) becomes obsessed with his brother-in-law's girlfriend (Scarlett Johansson). Eventually she falls for his charm – then falls pregnant. He ends up shooting her to protect his marriage.



3 CLOSER: A journalist (Jude Law) can't choose between his waitress/stripper girlfriend (Natalie Portman) and his lover, a photographer (Julia Roberts). The photographer, in turn, can't choose between the journalist and a doctor (Clive Owen)....

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