

# MIR BIG OR BIG MISTAKE?

He is the emotional bogeyman at the back of the closet, so just why do we all have a Mr Big waiting in the wings? Will the man we spend a lifetime lusting after ever be The One – or simply the one that got away?

“D id I really love Big, or was I addicted to the pain, the exquisite pain, of wanting someone so unattainable?” Carrie Bradshaw may be able to plan her wardrobe with military precision, but when it comes to love, life never goes according to plan. Sound familiar? Like most of us, the all-encompassing, gut-wrenching, mind-altering ‘big love’ is what she’s after – and there isn’t a man that walks into Carrie’s cramped New York apartment who exemplifies that better than the omnipresent Mr Big. Whether she’s accepting a marriage proposal from the sexy furniture designer Aidan – has any man ever

made lumberjack shirts so appealing? – being dumped via the medium of Post-It note by struggling novelist Jack Berger, or running off to Paris with self-involved Russian artist Aleksandr, there remains one man constantly at the back of her mind; always present and forever subconsciously determining her course of action when it comes to love choices.

This is why, when our favourite New York fashionista finally made it to the altar with her prince charming in last year’s movie, we all wept tears of joy – and relief. After all, not many of us can admit to not having had a ‘one that got away’ buried somewhere in our past – that is, if we ever really ‘had’ them in the first place. One that, if only we were thinner,

smarter, richer or better-dressed, we may have been able to keep hold of. The man who, if we could make a relationship work by sheer force of will, would have got down on one knee with a shiny Tiffany solitaire a long time ago. If, after so many false starts and heartaches at an age when most nubile New Yorkers are already smug-settled types, Carrie found “real love – ridiculous, inconvenient, consuming, can’t-live-without-each-other love,” with the man she’d been pining after since episode one, after bumping into the suave sophisticate on a Manhattan street, maybe we can make it work too? Maybe Mr Big – for surely, if we’re honest, we all have one lurking in the shadows at the back of our minds – could be Mr Right after ►





IMAGE TRUNK ARCHIVE

all? Except of course, real life rarely imitates fiction or the big screen, as Michelle Davis, 35, found out over the course of twelve years. A real estate agent from Abu Dhabi, Michelle believes that finally letting her Mr Big go was the best thing she's ever done. "I first met David at university and I instantly fell in love. He had these intense blue eyes that literally made me quake. What girl wouldn't go weak at the knees when a man's opening line is 'Can I fly you to Switzerland this weekend?'"

"We started dating immediately and were blissful until I found out he was already dating a girl back in Canada. I was devastated, and

ended it immediately. I went on to date another man, Jeff, but still admired David from afar, while he continued to enjoy living his own life. Jeff and I got engaged three years after leaving university but I still couldn't shake my feelings for David though and eventually caved in and called him. We met up in London and carried on a secret relationship for three years despite our current ongoing relationships. David made it very clear from the start that he would never leave Robyn but I told him I was madly in love with him and begged him to be with me. David did

eventually leave Robyn – but for a woman called Simone, not me.

"A few years later, I moved to the UAE, left Jeff and got engaged to another man, Edward. During a business trip to Dubai, David called and asked to meet up. I refused. He was angry that I was effectively throwing 10 years down the drain but I ignored him. Two years later, I split up with Edward and impulsively contacted David again. He had moved to Dubai and was now engaged to Simone. Just like before, we started to see each other again. Then one day, he said something that changed my life forever. 'I fell in love at a very young age to a girl who broke my heart. I promised myself that I would never ever fall in love like that. No one will ever make me feel that unhappy again.' It suddenly clicked. For the past 12 years, I had put my destiny in David's hands – I was letting him ruin every relationship I had ever had. I was in love with a man who would never return my love. Enough was enough. Fast forward three years and I am now happily married to a man called Peter and we have two sons."

As Michelle found out, the fantasy of Mr Big is often more attractive than the reality. Make something unattainable and it immediately becomes more desirable. He is a blank canvas on to which we can paint hopes and dreams – two point four kids, a house in the country and a constant shower of gifts and compliments. And it's no coincidence that we don't learn Mr Big's real name until the last episode of the final season of *Sex and the City* (it's John Preston, for the record) – it ruins the illusion and has the potential to knock the man off the pedestal that we've placed him so firmly on.

So why do we do it to ourselves? Helen Williams, of Counselling Dubai, explains: "Big represents the mythical character who can make all our dreams come true and often is





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formed early in our childhood. The illusion that someone can bring us happiness is hard to lose." But of course, the potential for him to make us unhappy is often far greater. Lisa Spears\*, 31, knows the feeling all too well. "I met Toby fresh out of university – in fact, he gave me my first job at an investment bank in London. If I'm honest, he had no small part in my decision to take the role – he interviewed me and the chemistry sizzled. He was everything the boys I was used to dating weren't – sophisticated, beautifully dressed and 20 years older. And, of course, my boss. We soon started to work closely on a project together that took us to New York and Dubai regularly. I had to pinch myself when one thing led to another and we started a clandestine relationship."

Of course, Mr Big doesn't always automatically mean Mr Moneybags, but the common thread running through most of these relationships is elevated status. Helen Williams explains, "I'm sure we're hot wired to be attracted to money, power and social standing as a safety and protection factor – this would appear to be what we need for creating a safe and secure family life. Unfortunately it often means that the man on the pedestal is more in love with himself than with the woman, hence the failure rate." Mr Big is also often older, as Helen also points out, as he is in many ways the idealised father figure. "The unavailable male is often a fairly true representative of our own father and therefore feels wonderfully familiar – hence the attraction."

Unlike the stable father figure, the Bigs of this world are often far from reliable, as Lisa eventually found out. "At first I was bowled over that Toby would even look at me twice, let alone lavish jewellery, handbags and weekends away on me. Of course, we never told our colleagues and he never asked to meet my friends. I let things carry on like that for two years, then late last year, the credit crunch hit and I lost my job. Luckily, I soon found work

in Dubai and he was kind about it at first, but I guess when I wasn't around as much he lost interest. Eventually, he stopped calling. I was heartbroken. It wasn't until I bumped into him – and his new 25-year-old wife – at a conference last month that I realised he'd never really seen 'us' as more than a fling. A hard lesson to learn, but better late than never."

The cliché of the top-level, high-pressure city job is also one we associate with Mr Big. Imogen Watt\*, 29, spent years pining after hedge fund manager Rufus, whom she met in a nightclub. "There was something totally seductive about his relaxed attitude to money – because he had so much of it. He had exquisite taste and thought nothing of whisking me away to suites in five-star hotels for the weekend. If I ever got upset with him – he worked incredibly long hours and could be very emotionally distant – he used to throw money at the problem. There aren't many women who can stay angry when sporting a brand-new pair of Christian Louboutin shoes." Often, highly successful men will employ the same tactics in relationships as they do at work, as Nana Efua-Otoo, an occupational psychologist, explains. "It is very seductive to always get what you want. If most of his life is spent at work or thinking about work, and dominating in said arena this can be a difficult balance to strike – unless he is very self aware and makes a huge conscious effort not to let how he behaves at the office filter into his personal life."

It is almost impossible not to be awed by the spoils of the city high-flyer, but often the character traits that secure the six-figure bonuses don't bode well for a lasting relationship. Holistic consultant Shivani Adalja explains, "We know that the man who whisks you to Paris in a private jet has a short attention span. You know it right away when his BlackBerry keeps beeping throughout the romantic dinner, while you're talking about your feelings. But you overlook this. Why? We women sell ourselves short and settle for the emotionally unavailable man because ▶



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## MR BIG OR MR RIGHT?

How to spot him early on...

### MR BIG WILL...

Lavish you with Louboutins, Tiffany and Lanvin – all bought by his secretary, who knows your shoe size better than your own mother.

### MR RIGHT WILL...

Bite the bullet and buy you the kitten you've always wanted for your birthday – and promise to look after the litter tray.

### MR BIG WILL...

Book a Friday night table at Nobu and order Cristal – because it's his favourite.

### MR RIGHT WILL...

Remember your seafood allergy and whip up a homemade lasagne at your place when you've had a bad day at work.

### MR BIG WILL...

Expect you to hang off his arm looking pristine at work functions.

### MR RIGHT WILL...

Invite you to his best friend's wedding – and to his parents' house for Christmas.

### MR BIG WILL...

Drop off the face of the planet when he's on a work trip/stag do/visit home.

### MR RIGHT WILL...

Call you every day and leave notes around your apartment to make you smile.

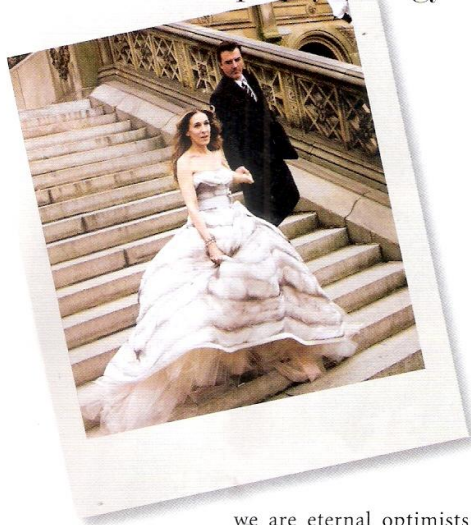
### MR BIG WILL...

Be constantly looking over your shoulder.

### MR RIGHT WILL...

Not be able to stop himself gazing into your eyes.





we are eternal optimists (like Carrie). We feel our love will change him, we feel our relationship will grow meaningful and we might be the one to actually get a full drawer space in his bachelor pad if he learns to acknowledge that he too is in love. So we go on this long quest and often end up alone because we fail to acknowledge that any relationship needs two to tango."

So can it ever work with Mr Big? Not even for Carrie, it seems. Whispers reach us that it might not be happily ever after in the upcoming second instalment of the movie franchise, as Berger, a.k.a Mr Post-It note, was papped on location with the fabulous foursome in Morocco. Sources who have seen the script are suggesting Carrie has an ill-advised dalliance with her sexy ex. Even Candace Bushnell didn't opt for her own Mr Big in the end – and the creator of Carrie and Co. admits she was engaged to several of them in her 30s. She eventually settled down with Charles Askegard, a ballet dancer 10 years her junior. "I waited for the right person, and I encourage other women to do the same," she explains.

There are of course those lucky few whose Mr Big does eventually reveal himself to be a Mr Right, but more often than not the road

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to this revelation is a rocky one, with the path of this all-consuming love rarely running smoothly, often laden with heart-ache.

But if you really are determined to take the plunge, what should you be asking yourself first? Helen Williams offers some pointers. "Stop and take a moment to ask – what is missing in my current relationship? What are my expectations? What are my role models for good relationships? Am I expecting my needs to be met by someone or something outside of myself?" And why do I potentially set myself up for a fall?

Shivani Adalja advises examining your reasons thoroughly before committing to Mr Big. "We need to acknowledge that there is no perfection and look within ourselves to find what we are seeking, rather than chasing a man who might or might not want you. Our chase for the unattainable reflects our own lack

of grounding energy and our lack of faith in ourselves. Look within and chase your dreams. Don't chase your Mr. Big because at the end of the day he just might tell you he wants his drawer space back."

In Michael Patrick King's own words, Producer of *Sex and the City*, Mr Big remains "always slightly out of reach." For some of us, maybe this alarm bell proves it's better this way, even if he is Mr Right, because more often than not they will forever hold you and your happy-ever-after at arm's length. But for others, the eternal optimists and romantics amongst us, heeding this warning means forever snuffing out the flame of true love. And for the Carries in us all, that all-encompassing, gut-wrenching, mind-altering 'big love' can never be truly extinguished, even it can never truly be obtained, either. ■

\* Name has been changed

## THE EXPERT OPINION

### BEFORE YOU BIN YOUR MR BIG:

"Not all relationships with this sort of man are doomed. Emotional maturity teaches us that we need to learn to be true to ourselves and to make realistic choices that serve us well, not lead us away from our own truth. Give yourself a checklist – some important questions to ask yourself:

- What is my self worth like? What about his?
- How will this relationship enhance rather than reduce us?
- Am I able to be true to myself while with him?
- How much do I adapt to suit him?
- What are my expectations?
- Do I lose myself when with him?
- What do I really know about him? His real values, ideals, goals, beliefs and family ideals?
- Are we equal?"

HELEN WILLIAMS,  
COUNSELLOR

### HOW TO SPOT A MR BIG – AND KEEP HIM:

"Women are attracted to a strong, successful man who takes charge. However, we cannot generalise; it very much depends on the man – he could appear on the surface to be quite the opposite, and yet end up like Mr Big in relation to how they treat women.

Carrie succeeded to walk him down the aisle, so it worked for this particular Mr Big but it all depends on the man, his personality and what he values in women and relationships. However, it is safe to say that a needy and whining woman will be fairly unattractive to most men."

NANA EFUA OTOO,  
OCCUPATIONAL  
PSYCHOLOGIST

### IS IT WORTH RISKING IT ALL FOR MR BIG?

"Maybe, but if a woman is drawn to such a man, the big question is what is attracting her to him. If there are values missing in her current relationship such as adventure

and passion, she can ask herself how to inject these into her life or in the current relationship. There needs to be some work done here and the truth is that every person always has choice. It is all about self awareness and getting to know the values and fears which drive us in life."

YASEMIN DEMIRTAS,  
RELATIONSHIP COACH

### HOW TO MOVE ON FROM MR BIG:

"You can always learn from a Mr Big, even if he isn't The One. Men like Mr Big teach you to look at warning signals early on. Don't repeat the same mistakes but at the same time remember that all men are not same. Take your time to get to know the person and don't be blinkered – remember that a surprise trip to Paris shouldn't be the deciding factor of this relationship. Be smart and look for a man with similar interests and outlook. Work on your strengths and discuss your weaknesses. Remember the three T's to a successful relationships – Trust, Truth, Tolerance."

SHIVANI ADALJA, HOLISTIC  
CONSULTANT