

DON'T TRY
THIS AT HOME

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I cut my boyfriend in half; it was what we both wanted. I said we could double our time together. He said he could be twice as productive. I don't think it would have worked with just anyone at any time. It had to be now.

Daniel got a spade off his mother that had belonged to his father, and to his father – both men who were never really all there. He lay on the bench in the concrete back garden, knees bent to squeeze in. The yard was carpeted with silver slug trails. I suppose we could have used the kitchen floor, but I didn't want to scratch the tiles.

'Are you sure?' I said.

'Yup.'

I stood over Daniel with a spade in my hand. He didn't look at me. He looked up, waiting to see the sky divide. I thought about saying 'I love you' or something in case it all went wrong, but I didn't want to admit it crossed my mind.

'One, two . . . ' I brought the spade down on three with my eyes shut. There was a second when I wanted to

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stop, but mid-air the spade hurtled towards my original intention, with or without all of me on board. The metal sliced through bone, chimed on the concrete like a bell. I opened my eyes. My boyfriend was staring at me with the spade in my hand. And my boyfriend lay looking up at the sky. He turned to look at himself, sitting at the opposite end of the bench.

‘How do you feel?’ I asked.

‘Fine.’

‘Weird, fine.’

He stood up and put his arms round me. And he just sat there watching himself. Both Daniels looked exactly the same, though the one hugging me had slightly rounded shoulders, a bit of a stoop. He wrapped me in his arms as if reminding himself how, rubbing his fingers up and down my back to remember how it felt.

Neither the huggy boyfriend nor the one on the bench asked me how I felt about the whole thing. It’s ok; I suppose some things just seem so much bigger for one person than another. But I sort of wished he had asked me what it was like, cutting him in half. I couldn’t explain it. It reminded me of when I was five and watching a worm I spliced wriggle away from itself. I remember there was a twang of guilt when I saw the damp patch on the spade, yet I felt a bit like God.

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I sliced my fiancé into quarters; it seemed the thing to do. We didn't do it right away. After the first time we went out to celebrate. The bartender glanced at my boyfriend with his arm around me. Then he looked at the other him, eyeing up the slot machine; I wondered if he thought I was going out with twins. Daniel's phone beeped, he texted, and sat holding my hand, looking at me as if we'd just met and I was all interesting, unpredictable, again. It cost more to buy drinks than usual, but it didn't matter at the time.

'Have a nice day,' I said.

'Yeah,' he said.

Daniel lay in bed beside me and watched himself leave for work. There was no conflict. I imagined he'd argue with himself to decide which part of him got to stay home with me, but it didn't happen that way. On weekdays the split came in handy. I wasn't working. All day I did housework, sent out CVs, painted rooms and alphabetised books to show him I was earning my keep. Sometimes I made love with the Daniel that stayed home. It was better than it had been in a while. Afterwards, he helped me paint the kitchen. He yawned when he got back from the office, eating meatballs with printer ink on his fingers. And he stretched where his back ached from reaching the ceiling, white paint in his hair. The

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white streaks sort of suited him, I could almost imagine him when he was old.

Once, I asked Daniel about how he proposed. Was he nervous? Scared?

Part of him was, he said. The other didn't know he was going to do it till the words popped out of his mouth. He was joining the lottery syndicate at work, and he was smearing the glass counters of jewellery shops. He stared at rows of engagement rings, trying to interpret what each one said.

'I'm tired,' he said.

'I've booked a table for us at Vincenzo's,' he said, putting on a clean shirt.

'Do you mind if I just stay in and crash?'

Daniel ordered the house white, putting his hand in his pocket every few minutes to check everything was where it should be. And he twirled in his desk chair in front of the computer, yawning and clicking links just to see what they were. I don't know exactly what he was looking at when he looked into my eyes and went down on one knee.

It was the wedding, I think, that made us do it again. Things to save for, dreams to buy. We went to buy paint

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for the hall during the week and carried ladders home on the bus.

'We could do with another car,' I said.

He sighed. He sighed, from both sides of the room like a draft blowing through a slightly open door.

'I could get a job,' he said. Standing straight, his stoop was hardly noticeable. He looked like he was manning up to the idea.

'You don't have to,' I said.

I covered the bridal magazines with my elbows. I didn't want a big do, not really. Common sense told me it was mad, but a bit of me couldn't imagine missing out on the opportunity for people to congratulate me for the first time in my life. What if it was the last?

They took Daniel's 'brother' on at the engineering firm where he already worked. The night before he started he laid his clothes on the chair like a kid before a new term at school. When he'd been working for a while, I asked him, 'Do you have lunch with yourself? I mean, at work?'

'No,' he said.

'Why not?'

'I'm my superior, it's not done.'

When he got home from work again – later because he walked home while his superior took the car – I asked, 'Why don't you have lunch with yourself at work?'

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‘We don’t have anything to talk about,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’ I said.

‘I don’t know. Forget I said anything.’

He was too tired to talk. It was easier not to. Lately, when he came home he talked about work, and he also talked about work. He didn’t notice my new spaghetti recipe, and was too wired to have an early night. I missed him. Our bank balance was fatter, but our evenings were so skinny I could see bone. The solution was clear.

I stood with the spade in the yard, tarp on the ground. Daniel lay down, ready as he’d ever be.

‘Shall I just do half of you?’ I asked. He turned his head to one side and looked himself in the eye.

‘It wouldn’t be right somehow,’ he said.

‘It wouldn’t be fair on part of me or something,’ he said.

‘How would we know which bit of me to split?’

I’d no idea. In the interests of symmetry, I brought the spade down. I aimed for the waist both times, but on the second strike the spade hit at an angle in the middle of his belly button. Daniel noticed a crisp packet that had strayed into the yard and got up to get it. He looked at his phone. He said he fancied a beer. And, again, he hugged me tight like someone trying to get that little bit more out of a tube of toothpaste, squeeze out that little extra bit



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of love. I noticed one of the new Daniels was a teensy bit shorter than before. He was listing to one side, one leg was longer than the other. I tilted, looking over his shoulder at the rest of him, barely noticing himself in my arms.



I diced my husband into pieces eventually. I never thought it would come to that; he was always too much. Daniel stood at the altar, and he . . . I'm not sure what else he did, I didn't ask. It made sense not to have all of him there. Our big day was bigger than us. What if that childish bit of him that still sniggered at words like 'moist' or 'flange' slipped out in front of my mum? That bit of him, and me, that would rather have worn cowboy hats in a five-minute ceremony during Happy Hour in Las Vegas had no place here.



'If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony, may you speak now or forever hold your peace.'

I heard Daniel shuffle at the back of the church, and I closed my eyes to be kissed. We stood outside for pictures on the grass, ducking here and there to avoid including the gravestones. I saw him out of the corner of my eye, leaning against the church wall wearing jeans. In some of the photos he was there in the background in a T-shirt, stubble on his chin, just watching himself

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stand next to my father in a suit like it was on TV. I axed the photos from the album; I didn't ask where the other parts of him had been.

It was a few years till we got the spade out again. It was Daniel's idea. He could work more, pay my loan off, since it was clear no one was hiring philosophers. He lined himself up against the garage wall. I swiped the spade through him like a credit card.

My husband worked in engineering, and he worked as a draughtsman at his firm. He drove a taxi, and he drove lorries of toilet rolls to Wales. He worked in a place that sold scuba gear, and he did the odd night on the door in swanky bars in town. He lived at the gym, and only lifted the remote. Some colleagues called him Daniel, some Dan, Danny, Danny Boy, one of the guys at the gym called him The D-man for no reason I could understand. I never knew how much of him would be home any night because of his hours. It was hard to keep track. The important thing was we got by, and he was with me, mostly.

'Do you still love me?' I said.

Daniel looked around as if waiting for someone to walk through the door and answer for him. 'Of course, I do,' he said.

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On our wedding anniversary I called a meeting, a sort of regrouping I suppose. I steamed mussels, baked bread and bought wine. Most of my husband came. He was away making a delivery, and he was at the bar, but the rest of him was home. We sat around the kitchen table. I looked at him and saw him – tall, toned and tanned, and I saw his belly, his slight stoop, his total focus and his distraction. He was unable to take anything seriously and was totally annoyed by everything on the news. He looked at himself watering down his wine, and cracked open a beer.

‘My job isn’t me,’ he said, rubbing his belly.

I think he meant driving a taxi, but I wasn’t sure. Parts of him were dead ringers for others, but some were so different they were like what twins would be if one grew up in a burger joint and the other on a farm. Daniel opened crisps and watched himself not listen. He didn’t say another word. Later, in bed, I nestled into him, trying to make something better, but I wasn’t really sure if I had the right part of him in my arms.

I discovered my husband was cheating a few weeks before Christmas. We were shopping near the market, Daniel carrying the bags. And I saw him grab the hand of a frizzy blonde woman with a dog in her handbag, not far from the bar where he worked. Daniel stared at himself

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ducking into a doorway, hands all over the woman, unruly, urgent, kissing like he was fourteen and would explode if he didn't. I made my way through the crowds. I lost them between buggies and indecisive shoppers sampling chutneys at the farmers' stall. I stood looking around, shoppers everywhere, door after door. Daniel stared at the empty doorway where part of him had dragged the woman for kisses that wouldn't wait. He stood still on the street. It was hard to pull him away.

'How could you do that?' I said. 'Why?'

'I wish I knew,' he said.

I wasn't enough for my husband. I realised it shortly after our sixth married Christmas. I cooked turkey. Daniel ate the drumstick, and wanted only the lean meat. He opened a can of beer at lunchtime, watched TV, and had the odd sip of wine while helping me peel the sprouts. We sat at the table. Something was missing. Part of him was driving a taxi all over town.

'Think of the money. Most of me will be there,' he had said, running his hand over his bristly shaved head.

I wanted to protest, but I didn't. I didn't want to think about what was missing. He was here, crashed out in front of the Queen's Speech, and helping me do the dishes. He gave me a gold necklace and kissed me next to the tree, then went to the bathroom to text the woman

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with the dog in her bag. He gave me underwear that didn't fit, and he found me an antique desk. He bought a new TV instead of doing presents, and he wrapped up a new roasting tray, a bar of chocolate and socks. It was a typical Christmas, but I kept thinking of him in his taxi. When he came home at about two and crashed, I slipped out of the crowded king-sized bed and sifted through the pockets of his jeans on the bathroom floor. There was no money in them, tips in clear bags awaiting the bank, just his phone. I opened it like a book I didn't really want to read. I stared at photos of a chubby woman in a ponytail. She was wearing pink sweat pants and a paper hat, holding up a baby dressed like a reindeer. There were photos of the reindeer baby and another child, a boy of maybe three or four, grinning, holding a big yellow cab in a box up to the camera. I looked closely at the cluttered room with a cheap carpet, the same clock on the mantelpiece that we gave to the charity shop last year. I put the phone down. Part of Daniel had a whole other family, part of him didn't want kids. He'd say that fireplace behind the reindeer baby was tacky. Everything about the room was so ordinary; he hoped for more. He liked everything clean. He wanted to do something extraordinary in life, to be going somewhere, but sometimes tacky and ordinary were enough.

I went out to the yard and picked up the spade, wanting to slice myself in two, but I didn't think it would

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work. I was always here, completely. I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I took the spade up the stairs and stood by the bed, watching Daniel sleep, the hair he'd grown into a ponytail again spread on the pillow, wax from his business-savvy haircut on the pillowcase next to it, his shaved head nestling into the sheets. I nudged the taxi-driving bit of him with the edge of the spade. It sliced through, a knife through the butter of his belly, though I barely touched him. He woke suddenly, four eyes opened wide. The rest stayed asleep.

'I found the photos,' I said. 'Aren't you happy with me?'

He looked at himself snoring. Then he looked back at me.

'Most of me is; then there's that little bit that thinks: what would my life be like with someone else? Who would I be?'

He got out of bed. He got out of bed. Both halves stood, packed one case between them and left without looking back at himself.

I'm still married. I have a husband with a little pot belly, a stoop to his shoulders and a funny belly button. He never leaves my side. Sometimes, other parts of Daniel come home, a slightly taller guy with flowers who looks, to me, no different than he did the day we met, though he is older, squishier and tougher-skinned. The rest of



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him is elsewhere, living in a quayside apartment with a woman with a dog with a fancy haircut, or working around the clock to make ends meet and put food on the table for three kids. He is rich, and he is poor. He is tired, and loves skiing in Italy. He is ambitious, and has given in. We are happy, and bored. Sometimes I miss him. I see him look out of the window, wondering where part of him went. I stand beside him, handing him tea. And I wonder if someone somewhere is doing the same, looking out of windows, longing for the part of him that's with me.