

John Boyne
Short short story no.1

Double

My brothers and I stare at the coffins which are lined up alongside each other, four by four, a perfect square. These are just the ones they keep on the premises, the funeral director tells us. There are more in a catalogue and we can look at that later if we like. But these are the most popular ones. He runs a finger down the side of a dark mahogany casket with golden handles, coated on the inside with pale yellow silk. 'Beautiful, isn't it?' he says, looking at me. 'You'd live in it if you could.'

'I don't know whether we should get two of the same kind,' says my older brother Bobby. 'Or two different ones. I know Dad had a thing about mahogany but Mom, I think she preferred oak.'

'You could live in the mahogany coffin,' the funeral director tells us again and for a moment, I think he'd really like to.

'What do other people do?' asks my brother Marty. 'When this happens to them?'

'This isn't very common, if I'm honest,' says the funeral director.

'But when it does. What do they do? Do they go for the same kind or different ones?'

'You should really make a double,' says my brother Steven, speaking for the first time since we left the house this morning. 'Think about it. Wouldn't it be nice to bury a couple who spent thirty-seven years together in the one coffin? A couple who never spent a night apart during all that time? Don't you think it would make sense to bury them side by side, holding hands?' His voice is rising as he speaks; he's getting angrier and angrier by the sheer injustice of what has happened to us. The funeral director must be used to irrational outbursts of anger, inappropriately directed his way, but he frowns as he considers it.

'But they'd have to be buried on their side then,' he says finally. 'They'd fall on top of each other.'

'You'd dig a wider hole, doofus,' says Bobby and the funeral director says *oh* immediately, as if he's only just understood and colours slightly.

'I'm sorry, gentlemen,' he says, holding his clipboard close to his chest. 'We don't cater for that requirement here.'

I look over at the mahogany coffin and can tell what a beautiful piece of workmanship it is. So clean, so polished, so comfortable. The outside world is noisy. To get inside, to lie down for just a moment, to close the lid and sleep. It sounds pretty good to me. I glance across the room at my brothers, who are looking through the catalogue now. I'm on my own with the coffins. It won't be easy to get inside but I think I can do it.

'Two of these,' I shout across at them a minute or two later. 'Two of these for sure.'