

1 When Barbara Shore had been told she was going to have twins, she had said  
nothing at all. Her doctor, an old-fashioned, comfortable country general  
practitioner believed her to be struck dumb with delight<sup>1</sup>. That, after all, was the  
proper response. But Barbara had only said, after a while, 'How perfectly  
5 preposterous<sup>2</sup>,' and had then gone home to do what she did best in times of  
crisis, which was to rest in bed.

Her husband, William, came home from a day's history teaching at a local  
minor public school, and found her resting.

'It's twins,' she said. She sounded accusing.

10 He sat, with some difficulty, on the satin-covered quilt beside her.

'How wonderful!'

'For whom?'

'For both of us.' He thought a bit, and beamed<sup>3</sup> at her. 'Shakespeare had  
twins. Hamnet and Judith.'

15 'I don't want twins,' Barbara said distinctly, as if speaking to someone hard  
of hearing. 'I only just want one baby and I certainly don't want two. It's awful  
being a twin.'

'Is it?'

'Awful,' Barbara said.

20 'How do you know?'

'Because I have an imagination,' Barbara said. 'Because you can never be  
quite your own person, if you're a twin, because it stunts<sup>4</sup> your relationships with  
anyone else, because you can't ever be quite free of the other person.'

25 William got up and went over to the window. Outside, the autumn fields lay  
pleasingly striped with stubble and speckled with partridges. He was full of delight  
at the thought of twins, at the completeness that a brace of babies suggested.

'The Americans love twins,' he said irrelevantly. 'There's somewhere called  
Twinsburgh, in Ohio, where they-'

'Shut up,' Barbara said.

30 'We'll get a nanny, a mother's help. I'll buy a washing machine.' His eyes  
suddenly filled with tears at the thought of his pair of babies existing there, inside  
Barbara's body, only feet away from him, the size, perhaps, of hazelnuts. 'I'm -  
I'm so happy.'

'It's all very well for you,' Barbara said.

Joanna Trollope, *A Spanish Lover*, 1993

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<sup>1</sup> delight : pleasure

<sup>2</sup> preposterous : absurd

<sup>3</sup> beamed : smiled

<sup>4</sup> to stunt : to keep from growing