

Futures

Not not happy

Parallel perspectives. By Deborah Walker



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

I'm trying to decide: limodillo or limodanda, when she materializes in front of me. She says, "Hiya, I'm you."

She *does* look like me. I groan. What fresh hell is this? She's immaculately dressed, a white suit, a statement black pearl necklace. In fact, she's a bit better looking than me, and therein lies the clue. She must be a marketing bot. They're always coming up with clever new ways to make you buy stuff.

"No, thank you. I'll make up my own mind what to drink." Incredible. How can the soft-drink people afford to custom build marketing bots to sell a \$5 can of pop? I don't want to be around when that bubble bursts.

"I'm not a pop bot," she says.

Hmmm. She is rather polished for the mass market. I know what she is. "I'm not in the market for any cosmetic surgery, thank you very much," I tell her, it, me, whoever. "My telomere enhancements are quite up to date. I'm happy with my current anti-ageing provider. I've been with them for donkey's years."

"I'm not trying to sell you anything. I'm you."

"Neither am I in the market for any new religion."

"Look," she says. "I'm not a sell bot, or a god bot, and I have to tell you that by law, right?"

"Right," I say, slowly. And if that's true, she must be something to do with the big industry. I flick my hair. "Have I been famed?" I look around discretely for the cameras, although I wouldn't see them, of course. A million cameras could whirl on the head of pin. If there's one industry with a bigger budget than marketing, it's the media peeps.

"No, it's nothing like that." My gorgeous doppelgänger frowns. "I am actually you, but from ..."

When she frowns, her forehead doesn't move a millimetre. "You're me from the future. Wow, that telomere treatment is amazing. I love it."

She frowns again, perfectly, beautifully immobile. "I'm not from the future. I'm from a sideverse."

"Come again?"

"I'm from an alternative world in the multiverse. We've found a way to come through the side lines."

Yes, if there's a way, they'll do it. She's probably a sell bot from a sideverse without Peace and Quiet Legislation.

"I can see you're busy," she says, smoothly, "but can I just ask you one question? It would really help me out?"

Yes, a sell bot alright. They're always trying to get you to engage. "I haven't got time. Sorry."

"It's a yes/no answer. Please. Pretty please. Pretty please with brown sugar on the top?"

They've done their research properly. My annoying little sister always used to say that to me. "Go on then," I tell the me bot.

"My question is this," she nods, giving her question a tad of importance. "Are you happy?"

"Happy with what?"

"With everything. Are you Janice Bowl of sideverse provisional designation, No Dinos Semi Free 7654, are you happy?"

"I don't know."

"Come on, you must know if you're happy or not."

I think about my life, in all its aspects. All the moments of repetition, the moments of disappointment, and the breath-taking beauty of the world I live in, all the people I have loved/will love, all the words I have read, all the sights that have filled my eyes, and the thoughts and feelings and moments all to come, all the privileges, the very fact that I'm alive, the very gift of every breath I take. "I'm not not happy," I tell her.

"OK. Thank you very much."

"That's it?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"You're going back to the sideverse?"

"Yes." She unclasps her black pearl necklace. "We believe in sharing our technology. This necklace is a portal. Just think about visiting me and twist the pearls. It's my gift."

It seems rude not to take it.

The me bot dematerializes. I stare for a

moment at the necklace, before popping it into the key tray and turn back to the eternal debate: limodillo versus limodanda.

It's a year to the day when she visits me again. I'm a little older; she looks just the same.

"You haven't visited our sideverse."

"I've been a bit busy."

She grabs my arm. "In all the worlds I've visited, the thousands upon thousands, and all of the us I've spoken to, every single one of them visited my sideverse – except you."

"Sorry."

"You know what that means, don't you?" Her eyes are wild.

"I'm afraid I don't. Sorry."

"It means that you, Janice Bowl of sideverse provisional designation, No Dinos Semi Free 7654, are not only not not happy, but you're content with your lot, with no desire to see how your other half live. You are, in fact, happy."

I think about my life, in all its aspects. All the moments of repetition, the moments of

disappointment, and the breath-taking beauty of the world I live in, all the people I have loved/will love, all the words I have read, all the sights that have filled my eyes, and the thoughts and feelings and moments all to come, all the privileges, the very fact that I am alive, the very gift of every breath I take.

"Yes. I suppose I am."

"You know what that means?"

"What?"

"It means that you, Janice Bowl, have the secret of happiness."

Within the room, half a dozen scientists materialize. They look at me like I'm a bug under a lens.

"Happiness," says my other self. "We just have to wrinkle the secret out of you. We're going to offer it all over the multiverse. Happiness!" She punched the air. "Now, that's something we really *can* sell."

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THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Deborah Walker reveals the inspiration behind *Not not happy*

One of the skills I would love to have is writing faster. You hear of these writers who are writing and publishing a book a month, an astonishing feat that has been made possible with digital publishing

You even hear about writers who publish more than one book a month. I believe these are usually gestalts, teams of people writing as one.

But I look at fast writers with envy.

And every now and again, I will undertake a fast-writing experiment. I want to write faster with the same, or preferably better, quality stories. Any writers in the audience should check out Rachel Aaron's work: 'How I Went From Writing 2,000 Words a Day to 10,000 Words a Day'. The three legs of Racheal Aaron's fast-writing stool are:

1. Know what you're writing before you write.
2. Optimize your writing routine, in terms of time and location.
3. Write the exciting stuff.

Not not happy was the product of one of these writing experiments. Produced in a marvellous day when I wrote 8,000 words. Something of a personal best.

It's true that much of what I produced that day remains abandoned. But *Not not happy* was one of those outlier stories, arriving more or less finished. It didn't need endless reworking. It was almost as if I plucked it out of an alternative sideverse.

I really ought to try that experiment again.

