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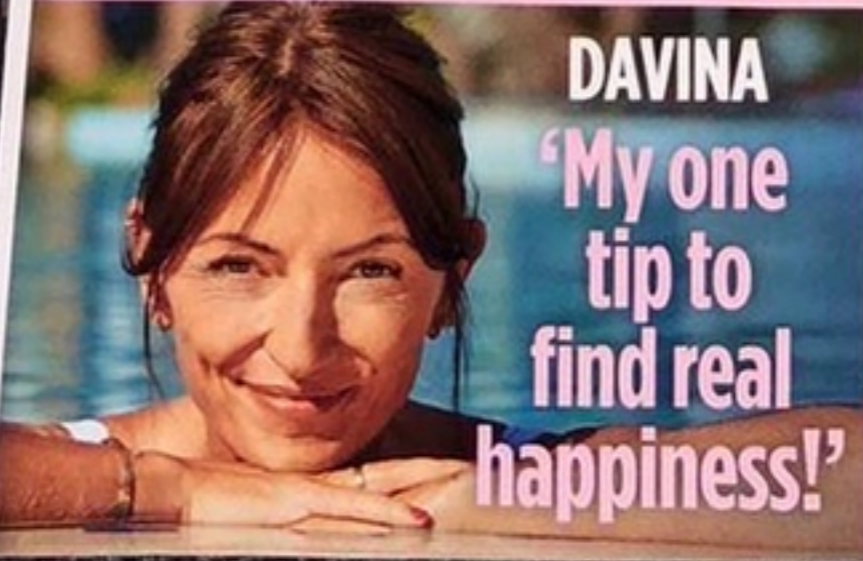


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DUCHESS BEGS HIM
TO THINK AGAIN**



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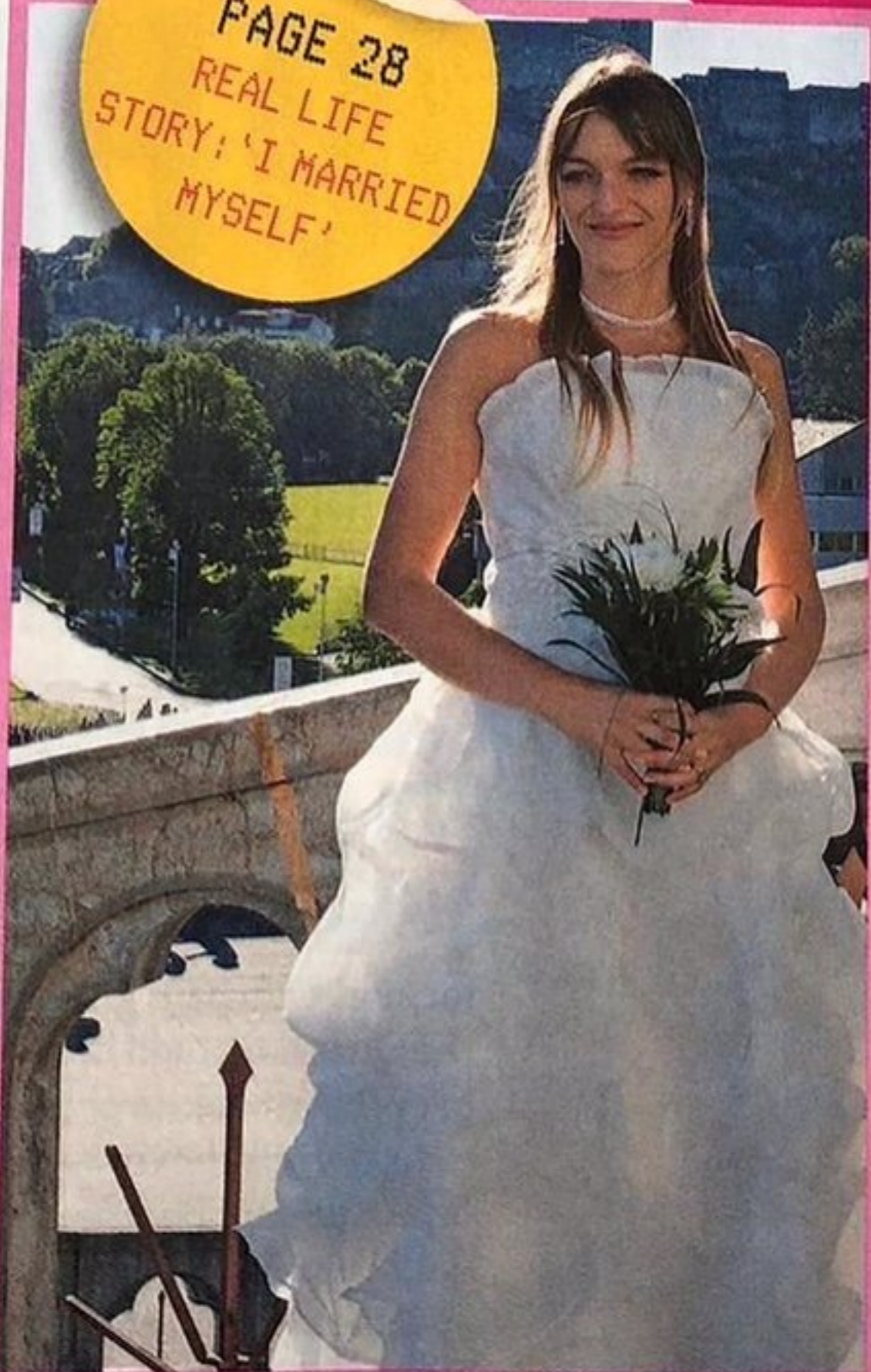
'My one tip to find real happiness!'

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'My fiancé cheated on me – so I married myself'

Heartbroken and humiliated, Eva Ostrowska was determined to turn her life around

Ever since she was a little girl, Eva Ostrowska had dreamt of marrying the love of her life in a big white wedding. But when she discovered that her fiancé had slept with someone else two months before their big day, she knew she had to create her own happily ever after.

Ditching her cheating partner, Eva, now 33, chose to marry herself instead. She says, "I was devastated – all my hopes and dreams for our future together were crushed. But instead, I chose to love and honour myself. It's great being married to myself, and I have no regrets."

Eva met her partner on Tinder in 2015, and after one year together, they got engaged. The invites had been sent out, family members had booked hotels, Eva had chosen a big white gown, and the priest arranged.

But while visiting family in her native France, Eva received a devastating email from a mutual friend. It contained a screenshot from a woman claiming she'd slept with Eva's fiancé two weeks before they'd got engaged.

Eva recalls, "It was brutal. I fell to the floor in floods of tears and felt like

my heart had ripped out. I was burning with anger but, due to the nine-hour time difference, I had to wait to confront him.

"At first he denied it and called our friend a liar. But then he slowly started confessing. I knew immediately I couldn't go through with marrying him."

WASTED TIME

Eva called off the wedding, but a few days later, her bridal gown arrived. She says, "I tried it on, and seeing my reflection was tough. I loved my traditional, sleeveless dress, and I cried over all the wasted time, energy and money. But as I stared in the mirror, I had an idea. I didn't need my fiancé or anyone else. I was enough."

Eva hadn't heard of sologamy – the act of marrying oneself – before, so she researched how to make it work. She kept the same wedding date but changed the location to the holy town of Lourdes, south of France. She recalls, "I only told my mum and brother what I was doing. They



It was an emotional day for Eva

were shocked, but Mum could tell how much I needed this. She wasn't disappointed that she wouldn't get a son-in-law because she just wanted me to be happy."

The day before her wedding, Eva travelled to Lourdes by train and booked a local photographer. She then checked into a single hotel room and spent her hen night alone with a bottle of wine and a Chippendales YouTube video. She says, "It wasn't how

I pictured the night before my big day, and I did feel nervous, but I didn't get cold feet."

The next day, Eva went to the grotto in Lourdes, a Catholic shrine that draws millions of visitors every year. With just the photographer present, she said the traditional vows, changing the groom's name to her own, then put on a ring she'd bought herself. She threw her flower bouquet over her shoulder and some handfuls of rice.

EMOTIONAL

Eva says, "It was very emotional, and I cried afterwards. Some people came up to me and asked where the groom was, while others thought I was a widow. I told them that I didn't have a husband and was marrying myself. No one understood – they thought I was mad! "I felt so proud of myself though. When I told my friends and



Eva spent her hen night with a Chippendales video



With her ex-fiancé



She said her ceremony was empowering

after posting about her unique wedding, women have asked her for advice. She says, "Divorced women and single mums have been particularly supportive, especially those who want to learn how to love themselves again."

"I have dated over the years, and I've had one partner since I married myself. He wanted to get married, but I didn't as I'm already married – so the relationship ended."

family the news, they laughed and thought I was insane. But once they got past the shock, they were proud of me too."

Eva had a meal by herself to celebrate and then, two weeks later, went on a solo honeymoon to Spain.

Now, Eva is loving being happily married to herself, and

Eva, who is an artist, marks

'I REALISED I DIDN'T NEED ANYONE ELSE. I WAS ENOUGH'

her anniversary by booking the day off work. And on Valentine's Day this year, she celebrated by renewing her vows in the metaverse – a virtual online world where people explore and interact via avatars.

VOWS

She says, "I wore a virtual reality headset and chose an avatar dressed in white. I renewed my vows in front of a digital crowd, and afterwards we had a dance party. It was great fun!"

"I plan to renew my vows on my tenth anniversary. I'm not sure what I'll do, but it'll be something quirky and exciting."

"You don't know what life is going to throw at you, so I'd never say never to marrying another person one day, but I'd have to divorce myself first! I'd love for more people to join the sologamy movement because marrying myself was the happiest, most empowering day of my life."

By Amber Connolly

'But what have you done with the groom?'

My fiancé had done the dirty, but I wasn't about to be left standing at the altar! **By Eva Ostrowska, 33**

I looked at my boyfriend Mark and my mouth dropped open in shock. 'Are you being serious?' I said.

We were at a concert and he'd just turned to me and said: 'Will you marry me?'

I shook my head. 'Don't be silly,' I replied. 'We've only been together for a month!' But although I didn't say yes, I was bowled over by him.

We'd met on Tinder, and when we went on our first date, there were sparks.

And even though it wasn't the right time for us to be thinking of marriage, I felt sure we had a future together.

Over the next few months our relationship went from strength to strength.

And when we'd been together for a year, Mark proposed again.

This time, he went down on one knee and I said: 'Yes!'

We shared our happy news on Facebook together with a photo of us smiling.

Then we set a date and started planning our big day.

I wanted a traditional do, and chose a gorgeous white wedding gown.

We booked a venue and sent invitations to 60 friends and members of our families.

They got busy, booking themselves into hotels ready for the big day.

But two months before we

were due to say 'I do', something happened.

I was visiting my family in France, when an email popped up on the phone. It was from a woman I didn't know.

I opened it and what I read tore my heart in two.

She claimed that she'd slept with Mark — two weeks before we got engaged.

I couldn't believe it. I was so shocked and upset, I collapsed.

I thought: *It can't be true.*

But I couldn't see why anyone would make something like that up.

Mark was at home, so I called him.

'I know what you've done,' I said.

'What?' he replied. 'What are you talking about?'

I explained about the email I'd been sent.

'She's a liar,' Mark said. 'You

have to believe me.'

But I wasn't sure I did.

'Are you certain you're telling me the truth?' I said.

I kept on asking until finally he admitted that something had happened between them.

Stunned, I put the phone down and sobbed.

Heartbroken as I was, there was no going back, and I told my mum and brother: 'That's it, the wedding is off.'

Everyone was so upset.

Over the next few days, I was in bits.

Then one afternoon, the doorbell rang and a huge box arrived.

When I realised what was inside, my hand jumped to my mouth.

It was my beautiful bridal gown, which had been sent on to me from home.

Despite everything, I got it out of the box and tried it on.

But when I faced my reflection in the mirror, I felt crushed.

Even though I looked like a bride, I wasn't one any more. It had all been snatched away from me.

But then something hit me.

I thought about all the time, effort and money I'd put into my wedding, and I knew I couldn't bear to see it all to go to waste.

I still wanted my big day — groom or no groom.

And I had an idea...

I went online and discovered other women who'd done the same thing, and then I told my family.

'I'm still getting married,' I said.

'What?' they gasped.

'Yes,' I went on. 'I'm getting married to myself!'

They gawped at me. I knew it

was a shock, but at last Mum said: 'I just want you to be happy. So if this really makes you happy, you go for it.'

I gave her a big hug. I knew she was a little disappointed she wasn't getting a son-in-law, but with her blessing, it was full-speed ahead with the new wedding plans.

I decided to keep the same date, but as I was already in France, I changed the location to Lourdes.

Planning everything felt like an act of revenge.

I wasn't just sitting and wallowing, I was doing what I wanted.

I contacted a local photographer and explained what I was up to.

'Will you take the pictures?' I asked.

Even though I could tell he thought I was crazy, he agreed.

I travelled to Lourdes the day before the wedding to get ready. And then I realised I hadn't had a hen do.

Mark's not taking that from me, I thought.

So I checked into my hotel room with a bottle of wine, and found a Chippendales video on YouTube.

If I couldn't go to them, they could come to me. I even took a selfie as the bronzed hunks danced around my screen.

It wasn't quite how I'd pictured the night before my big day. But it still made me laugh.

Next morning, I woke up and began to get ready. I styled my hair and put on my make-up, then I stepped into my dress.

As I looked at my reflection, I felt a little bit nervous. But I was determined to go through with it.

I'd booked a hotel right beside

the Lourdes grotto, a beautiful shrine set within rocks, where I was going to tie the knot.

As I walked there, people stopped and stared.

Some thought that because of the way I was dressed, I was mourning a dead husband.

When I told them what I was really up to, they were stunned.

'He's not dead,' I said. 'He's dumped.'

I got to the grotto, and met my photographer.

'Are you ready?' he asked.

'I am,' I replied.

I started my ceremony with traditional wedding vows, removing Mark's name and inserting my own.

Then, as I agreed to love myself in sickness and in health, I slipped a ring on to my own finger.

As the photographer snapped away, I threw my flower bouquet over my shoulder and showered myself in confetti.

By now, I'd attracted quite a crowd, and more passersby stopped to watch what was going on.

'But where's the groom?' I heard someone ask.

I thought about Mark, and I realised that I didn't care where he was or what he was doing any more. I'd been able to move on.

After the wedding, I got changed and went out for a meal by myself to celebrate.

Then it was back to the hotel to sleep by myself in my single bed.

It was hardly what I'd thought I'd be doing on

my wedding night, but I felt at peace.

Not to be done out of a honeymoon, I even went on holiday alone to Spain.

It felt great, enjoying the sun and relaxing by the pool with just myself to please.

Back at home, I told all my friends the news. They laughed, but once they got over the surprise they were proud of me.

I put a post up online and so many women got in touch to show their support and ask questions.

Divorced women and single mums were especially interested in learning how to love themselves again.

In time, I met someone new and things between us became serious enough for him to say: 'I want to get married one day.'

I shrugged.

'Well,' I told him, 'I'm married already.'

So that was the end of that.

Truth is, I don't need another wedding. I'm more than happy being married to myself. In fact, I've already renewed my vows!

I'd love for more people to do what I've done. Getting married to yourself — or sologamy, as it's known — is all about putting your own needs and values first, and it's so empowering.

I'd never say never to marrying another person one day. But before that could happen, I'd have to divorce myself!

● *Mark's name has been changed.*



My hen do



On my big day



Mark and me



Me

Photos: Vincent Greco