

## First Prize

### The Dance of the Evil Twins

By Greg Beatty

“Um, excuse me?”

Dave took a healthy slug of beer before turning to see who had asked for his attention so hesitantly. “Yeah?” he said, the word barely covering a burp.

“Um, don't take this the wrong way, but ... you've got an evil twin, right?”

The regulars in the corner looked up. One nudged the other, who nodded. They settled in to watch.

David nodded and set the schooner back on the bar. “I did, yes.”

“You *did*? Wh-what happened?”

“Well, I got rid of him. Why do you ask?”

“I—” The woman broke off to nod her thanks when the bartender brought her a beer without her asking.

Dave spoke into the silence. “No. Don't tell me. You've got one too. How? A cursed tomb?”

“Nah,” she said. “My mom stared too long into a lake. Larissa's a punishment for vanity.”

They high fived. Then she laughed uneasily. “Sorry—I'm Lisa. I know it's not really anything to celebrate. It's just—most people don't understand. Most people don't even have a twin, let alone an evil twin. But if you got rid of yours, I have to ask. How?”

Dave pushed back his sleeve. Lisa whistled appreciatively. “That's some scar.”

She touched it with one finger, let it linger. “What happened?”

“Well, once I realized—you do share a psychic link with your evil twin, right?”

“Sure.”

“Had to ask. Well, once I figured out we were linked, it drove me crazy. He'd get mad, I'd get in a fight. He'd have another beer, I'd blow the legal limit after a dry day and have to walk home. This scar—I did that to myself after a particularly long day of reading his mind. I figured if I hurt him bad enough ...”

Lisa patted the scar. She got it. She also let her hand rest sympathetically on Dave's arm.

Dave left that hand in place and flicked the index finger of his other hand, setting the bartender in motion. Once another beer was headed his way, he went on.

“But as you know, evil twins live for pain. I about died from doing that to myself, but that just made him stronger. In response, Dan did this to himself and so to me. And I swear to shit, he was laughing the whole time.”

Dave pulled up his jeans, exposing his right leg. A road-rash scar marred at least 12 inches of it.

Without speaking, Lisa slipped her foot out of her shoe and ran her toes over the scar on his leg. She still hadn't let go of the scar on his arm.

They both shivered.

Eventually, she took a drink with her free hand. “So what happened?”

Dave got a grin on his face, the one that everyone knew meant he'd thought of something devilish and the results were going to be entertaining. “Well, I wallowed for a while, and then I had myself an idea. Evil thrives on pain, but it can't handle the positive side of life.”

“Makes sense,” Lisa said, but more like she was being polite than like she really understood. “So you, like, thought good thoughts?”

“You got it. I thought positively and did affirmations and posted motivational posters and made rainbows out of colored paper.”

He moved his beer through a semicircle, carefully not spilling any. “But thoughts weren't enough. Dan was still out there, ruining my life. So I petted puppies. I smelled flowers. I visited museums.”

“And?” Lisa asked, like she was asking for a check and about to check out.

But Dave knew the story he was telling. Dave brought it home.

“And I made sure I had the best sex in my life.”

“Come again for sweet Lisa?”

Dave looked away as if he were telling this story for the first time, as if he were embarrassed to say it out loud. He very carefully didn't look at her. “I don't know about you—I mean, I don't really know you—but sex has always important for me. I know, everybody likes sex, but I've never had any real religion. I like where I grew up, but it's not like I feel this connection with the land. And while I like my beer—” he paused to take a swig— “my tastes have always been pretty lowbrow. Expensive wine? Just tastes like horse piss. But sex—”

Dave turned to look Lisa in the face. “Sex has always been there for me. So I threw myself into it, making sure I had not just okay sex, not just good sex, but sex that was so ... To be honest, I passed out from the pleasure.”

Eventually, Lisa unbit her lip. No words came out until she coughed. Twice.

“Excuse me. You—you passed out?”

Dave nodded. “And when I woke up, Dan was gone. Forever.”

Lisa looked down. “Do you think you could help me get rid of Larissa?”

“No promises,” Dave said. “But I could give it a try.”

He threw some bills on the bar, and they were out the door.

Once the barflies were sure they were gone—the squealing tires were a nice, if predictable, touch—one said, “I thought Dave got those scars by working at the lumber mill drunk?”

“He did,” the other said.

The two graybeards chuckled. They clinked their longnecks together and were about to drink when the door to the bar flew open and Lisa burst back in.

After a moment, they realized it wasn't her. “Excuse me, ma'am,” one said. “Is your name Larissa?”

“Gosh darn it,” she said. “I guess that means I was right. Lisa was here. Where'd she go, who do I owe, and what did my evil twin do this time?”

The bartender brought her a beer without being asked and said, “The answer to all of those is the same: Dave.”

*When he's not writing, Greg Beatty walks with his dog, dabbles in the martial arts, plays with his grandchildren, and teaches college. For more information on Greg's writing, visit <https://beattytales.com/>. You can also find his stories on Amazon and Payhip.*