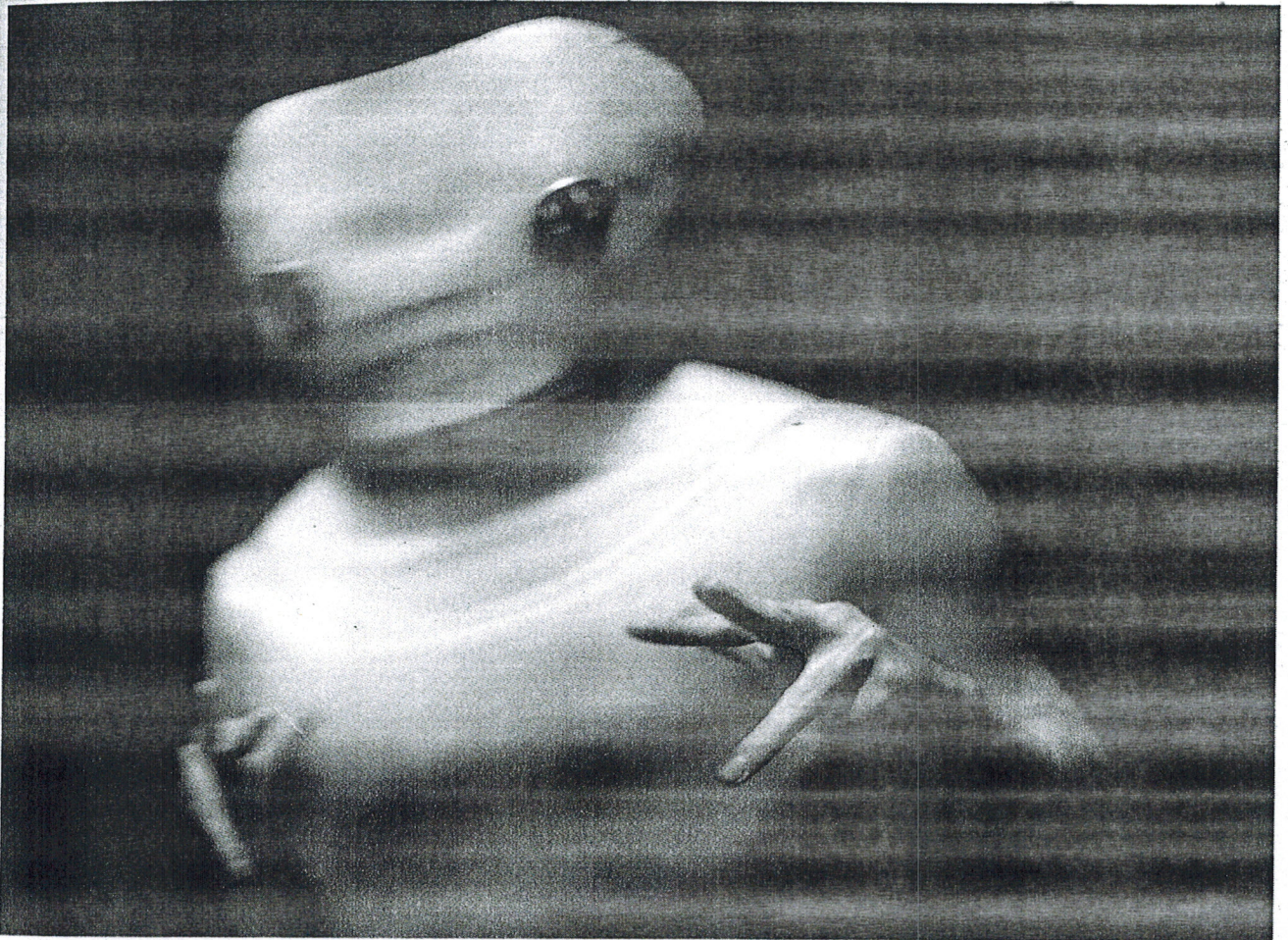


# Gore

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Twins have a very special bond. Together from their earliest moments of consciousness, they are true soul-mates. Linked by feelings of deep kinship and love, mutually attuned with an almost magic sensitivity, they often feel like two halves of the same person.

Twins separated at birth who meet as adults often discover amazing coincidences in their lives. They both have wives named Linda and sons called Hamish. At their weddings both of their best men wore kilts. They both have Maine coon cats and use an obscure Finnish brand of aftershave. This proves that the twin relationship is one of the strongest in the world, overriding individual personality and the forces of upbringing and environment.

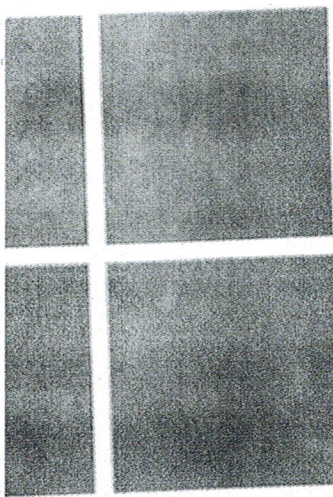
Horse patooties.

Soul-mates? Sometimes I can't believe that Lucas and I are in the same family, much less twins. In fact, there have been times when I've wondered if Lucas and I are even of the same species. I'm pretty much a basic homo

## Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- discuss the appeal of horror stories and films
- compare two characters
- assess the use of figurative language
- analyse the pace of the story



sapiens. Lucas is more like an unevolved thugoid. I've heard that there are some photos of twins in the womb that show them hugging. If someone had taken a photo of Lucas and me in there I'll bet dollars to doughnuts it would have shown him bashing me on the head.

Lucas must have grabbed all the good nutrition in there, too, because he's a lot bigger, faster, and stronger than me. I don't stand a chance on the bashing, kicking, running away, immobilizing-your-opponent-in-a-half-nelson front. As the years have passed, my two areas of superior firepower, an extensive vocabulary and a gift for voice impersonation, have sometimes proved inadequate. I have been forced to take up psychological warfare.

Lucas attacks without provocation. The other day, for example, I'm sitting reading. I finally got the new R. L. Tankard out of the library and it is extremely choice. There's this girl and she has a babysitting job in this glam apartment building, on the twenty-sixth floor. When she arrives, the baby is already asleep so she hasn't actually seen it. She's watching TV in a darkened room and she thinks she hears a noise from the baby.

*"She muted the TV for a minute and in the sudden silence she heard the noise again, but louder. It was a heavy wet noise, like the sound of a big piece of raw meat being flung to the floor. She stared at the door to the nursery. It was outlined in a thin band of crepuscular light. She stood up and, with her heart pounding in her ears, she approached the room ..."*

Isn't that excellent? I read it again. Sometimes I like to do that with R. L. Tankard—slow it down by reading the best parts twice before I turn the page. "Crepuscular." I roll the word around in my mouth like a hard candy. Who cares what it means? "... like a big piece of raw meat being flung to the floor." Choice.

Then, WHAP! Lucas leans over the back of the chair, rips the book from my hands, runs into the bathroom, and slams the door. I'm after him in a second but of course by the time I get there he has it locked. I learned years ago that you can click open our bathroom door with a knife. I learned this about two minutes after Lucas learned that you can wedge the bathroom door shut by pulling open the top drawer of the vanity.

I kick the door. "Give me my book back, you grommet-head."

"Make me."

I just hate that, the way Lucas can sound so smug. If possible I would appeal to a higher authority. I have no shame about finking, whining, telling, etc., when it comes to Lucas. I use whatever counter-weapons I have at my disposal. With Lucas as a brother it is sometimes necessary to have referees. I'm not ashamed to stand behind an adult peace-keeping force. Lucas regards this as an act of cowardice and wimpiness. He tries to shame me. "Why don't you run to Mummy?" But I don't care. I figure it is like some small but extremely valuable country calling on the United Nations

when attacked by an aggressor. Unfortunately, in this case, the peace-keeping forces are out at Mega-Foods doing the Saturday shop.

I try to plan a strategy. At least it keeps my mind off what is happening behind the door of that baby's room, in that crepuscular light. The carrot or the stick? Or, to put it another way, the chocolate cheesecake or the Uzi? I could try the chocolate cheesecake of false bribery. Such as, "Lucas, just give me my book and I'll do your poop-scooping in the backyard this week." This technique has lost its effectiveness through overuse, however. Even Lucas, microbrain that he is, doesn't fall for that one any more.

So what about the Uzi. "Lucas, if you don't give me back my book this minute I'm going to tell Dad that you ..." What? I've used up the fact that Lucas was the one who let the rabbit into Mum's office where he ate through her modem cord. I've already gotten my mileage out of the time he tried to photocopy his bum on the photocopier at the public library. I've used up everything I know about Lucas's sins, crimes, misdemeanors and shady dealings.

I collapse on the couch in despair. I am a stealth bomber with no aviation fuel. I am a pioneer with no powder for my musket. I am a merry man (well, OK, merry woman) with an empty quiver. I am weaponless.

Not quite.

"Rats. Lucas, there's someone at the door. I'll get it but I'm warning you, Lucas, if you're not out of there by the time I get back, you're toast."

"Yeah, with peanut butter."

I run to the door. The doorbell gives three loud blats.

"Just a minute. Coming!" I open the door.

There are two, no, three of them. The faces are hooded and I only catch a glimpse but it is enough to make me step back in horror, as though a huge hand has given me a push. This is my first mistake, leaving me a split second too late to push the door shut.

They are inside. They are silent.

"Hey, hold it, you can't do that. Get out of here. Help!"

I pull myself together and try to fool them. "Dad!"

The front door clicks quietly shut behind them. I race around the corner into the hall and fall against the bathroom door. I strain to hear.

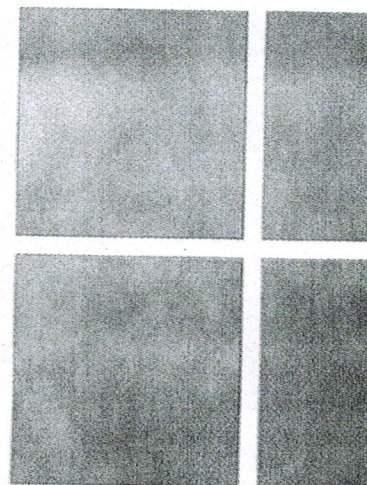
Nothing.

"Lucas," I yell-whisper.

Lucas's bored voice makes its way out of the bathroom. "Forget it, Amy, you're not fooling anybody."

"Lucas, I mean it. Let me in. Please. Those faces. They're not ... aagh." A shadow falls into the hallway. I grab the doorknob and screw my eyes shut.

The first thing is the smell. The fetid stench. The noxious reek. It is the smell of something dead, sweet and rotten. It rolls into the hall like a huge



wave, breaking over my head, flowing into my mouth and nose until it becomes a taste. I am drowning. I gasp, dragging the air painfully into my lungs.

"Very dramatic, Lady Macbeth."

I find a voice. "Lucas, can't you smell it?"

Lucas giggles and flushes the toilet. "Now I can't."

Then something ice-cold and soft and damp fixes itself around my wrist like a bracelet and begins to pull my fingers away from the door. I hold on, unable to talk, unable to breathe.

And then the voice. The voice as dry and white as paper. "Come with us, we need you. We need your being."

A cold sweat breaks out over my entire body. I grab at the door one last time as my slippery fingers slide off the knob. I grasp at anything. My fingernails scratch across the shiny surface. The door rattles.

"Lucas!"

Lucas laughs.

The thing moves me to the living room. Not roughly. Like a powerful, persistent and silent wind. I force my eyes open but I can't seem to focus. The room is shimmering like a mirage on a hot road. I am lying on the floor and the ceiling is pulsing slowly. The strong, crepuscular wind pushes me to the floor. I am pinned, paralyzed, frozen with terror. My heartbeat pounds in my ears.

The paper voice is louder. "Eat. Of. Our. Food." Each word is a little island of sound, a pebble dropped into a pool.

The ceiling disappears and a face looms above me. A smooth white mask, skin stretched across sharp bones. Bright yellow eyes that stare unblinking, like a baby or a reptile. Thick shiny brown hair. The echo of the smell of decay. I feel something being held to my lips. I lock my jaw and squeeze my lips shut.

The voice is louder, booming. "Eat. Of. Our. Food."

I see movement in the shiny brown hair. Movement that ceases the moment I look directly at it. I want to close my eyes but my eyelids are stiff and wooden. The movement increases. Shiny, brown, undulating, dancing like a thing alive.

Or many things alive.

Pink rat eyes. A scream consumes me, vomiting up from every part of my body. And into my open mouth falls a greasy, slimy goblet of ooze. I flail my head from side to side and try to spit it out but it turns to a thick, viscous, glutinous, sticky liquid that coats my mouth, rises up the back of my nose and clings to my teeth. I retch. I gag.

The mask floats once more above me. Its smoothness has now exploded into a cobweb of wrinkles, an old crazed china plate. The hair has turned

dead-rat grey. Beads of milky liquid ooze out of the yellow eyes, now dull and bloodshot, and begin to rain down upon my face. They are warm, then cold and solid. The quavery, rusty voice floats down to me, "You. Are. The. New. One. Now."

With a strength I didn't know I had, I force myself up. I beat away the mask face and push aside the shimmering air of the room through which my scream is still echoing. Chairs and side tables fall as I crash past them. Magazines fly through the air and crash against the walls.

"Hey, fink-face! What are you doing out there? Demolition derby?" I have no voice to answer Lucas.

I reach the phone in the hall just outside the bathroom door. I grab the receiver. I dial Emergency. I wait through a century of rings. Finally someone answers.

"Do you wish police, ambulance, or fire?"

My voice is choked with sobs. "Police, oh, police. Please, hurry."

Click. The line goes dead. Cold, gentle fingers touch the back of my neck. I drop the receiver which swings like a pendulum, banging against the wall, a dull, hollow sound.

I fall to the ground like a stone, like a piece of raw meat, and bury my face in my hands. My hands smell like skunk cabbage, no, like swamp water, no, like the bacon that somebody forgot in the back of the fridge. My face is smooth and cold and becoming more solid every second. My hair begins to move on my scalp.

They have me. I am becoming one of them. I feel my brain hardening inside my head.

I hold onto one thought. My dear twin. My brother. My boon companion. Fellow traveller on the road of life. Oh, God, don't let them take Lucas.

I try to picture the bathroom window. Oh, please, let him be skinny enough to get through it. My mouth is becoming rigid. I use up my last human words, "Lucas, break the window. Get out. For pity's sake, don't come out here."

Then silence. The only sound is the telephone receiver thudding against the wall.

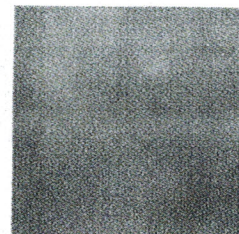
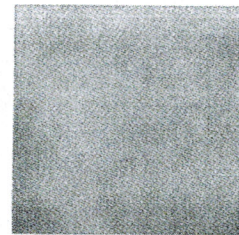
"Amy? You're just kidding, aren't you? That was pretty good. You know if you weren't so funny-looking you could probably become an actress."

Silence.

Lucas's voice shrinks. "Amy? Amy, come on. Quit it."

*Beep, beep, beep.* The telephone's humanoid voice rings out in the silent hall. "Please hang up and try your call again. If you need assistance dial your operator. Please hang up now." *Beep, beep, beep.*

The bathroom door opens slowly. I'm curled up behind it. I hold my breath. Two steps, that's all I need. Two measly steps.



"Amy?"

Two steps it is. I grab the door, swing around it, jump into the bathroom, and turn the lock.

Success! Triumph! Oh, happiness, oh, joy! I shake my own hand.

I slurp some cold water from the tap. My throat hurts a bit from that final scream. But it was worth it. It was one of the better screams of my career. There's something to be said for really scaring yourself.

R. L. Tankard is sitting on the back of the toilet. I open him up. R. L. Tankard is such a good writer that he can make you forget all about what's going on around you. He can make you forget, for example, a flipped-out twin brother using inappropriate language on the other side of the bathroom door. Listen. He's already repeating himself. Really, his repertoire of invective is pathetically inadequate. He should do more reading to increase his word power.

I settle down on the bathmat and find my page. So—what *was* in that baby's room? ■

## Activities

1. With a partner, discuss the appeal of horror stories or films. Why do so many people enjoy being scared by these kinds of stories? After your discussion, compare your ideas with those of another pair of students.
2. Compare the characteristics of the twins, Lucas and Amy. Use evidence from the story to back up your analysis.
3. This story contains many examples of similes and metaphors. Find as many examples as you can of each. Select two of each type that you feel are particularly effective, and explain the reason for your choices.
4. a) With a partner, take turns reading the story out loud. Listen for places where the narrative slows down or speeds up, and explain what techniques the author uses to convey the change of pace.  
b) Choose a section of the story that contains a change in pace, and try reading it aloud as a monologue. Use voice, gesture, pauses, and facial expression as well as the tone of your voice to convey the shifts in mood.