

THE DEVIL WENT DOWN TO STEVIE'S

By David Nikolas

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What's keeping you positive: My wife and my puppies!

Yes, you may publish this!

CHARACTERS

STEVIE, late 20s. (They/them)

Homeowner. Host of our party. Their high-school yearbook is on the coffee table and they are only too eager to tell you all about it.

SHEILA, late 20s. (She/her)

Works with Stevie. She lost her yearbook about a week after she got it, or burned it - she can't quite remember. Doesn't care that her bra is showing.

WARREN, 30 going on 50. (He/him)

Doesn't notice that Sheila's bra is showing. More likely to notice the brand of television in the living room and that you've hooked it up incorrectly for maximum cable bandwidth.

NICK, older. (He/him)

The guy your parents like to hear will be wherever you are.

PARTYGOERS, any age.

Voices of two of the guests at the party.

TIME

The week before Hallowe'en, in an October well after the pandemic. Later in the evening, nearing the climax of an annual costume party.

SETTINGS

Stevie's living room

Stevie's front porch

In the midst of a Hallowe'en party in full swing. Store-bought costumed revelers drink, talk, and dance with the homemade costumed guests. STEVIE, our host, is dressed as a cowgirl and is ladling punch from a smoking plastic pumpkin into orange and black Solo cups, setting them on the table in front of it. SHEILA, dressed as in a devil costume one might get from the "adult" section of the costume shop, approaches.

SHEILA

(taking a cup, warily)

So what's in this concoction?

STEVIE

You know, the usual - fruit punch, Seven-Up, eye of newt...

SHEILA

That's what I love about you, Steve-a-reno. You're a complete dork and you don't even care.

STEVIE

C'mon, it's Hallowe'en! Have a little fun!

SHEILA

Oh don't you worry about that.

(Sheila reaches into her tiny red sequined clutch and pulls out an airplane bottle of whiskey and pours it into her cup, smiling at Stevie. As Sheila turns, WARREN, also dressed as a devil, approaches. His costume is more like one would get from the "bashful nerd" section of the costume shop - a pajama-like onesie with a tail, complete with a hood.)

WARREN

(Pointing at the cups)
Uhhhh...there's no booze in this, is there?

SHEILA

(Waves her empty little
bottle)
Why, big guy - would you like there to be?

STEVIE

Sheila! Warren, this is my friend Sheila from the office.
Sheila, this is Warren. He just moved in next door. He came
in to feed Dexter last week when I was out of town.

WARREN

P...P...Pleased to meet you, Sheila. (He extends a hand)

SHEILA

(Disgusted) That vile little creature she thinks is a pet
lets you near him?

WARREN

(Laughing nervously) I dunno, me and rats, we just...get
along?

SHEILA

Color me shocked. (Sheila leaves to mingle. Warren picks up
a cup)

STEVIE

Don't mind her, she's kinda -

(Stevie notices that Warren is
watching Sheila walk away.)
- never mind. You get it already.

WARREN

What? Oh. You mean? Yeah, I mean...she's kinda...I dunno.

(Warren takes a sip from his cup
and begins coughing uncontrollably.
Before he can catch his breath, he
tries to take a step away,
immediately tripping over another
guest dressed as an angel.

Warren falls alongside the table, taking two cups of punch to the floor with him. The angel helps him up.)

NICK

Whoa there, fella. We're not really supposed to be duking it out, ya know. These are just costumes! (laughs)

WARREN

What? I didn't mean to...(looks at himself, then at Nick) oh, I get it.

(As Nick grabs Warren's hand, he cringes a little, but then straightens them both back up to standing.)

WARREN

Sorry, I've put on a few pounds since the quarantine.

NICK

Nah, it's ok. My back has never been that great. Nice costume! I love the traditional look.

WARREN

Yours is kinda...what's this?

(Warren notices a toy plastic trumpet on a string around Nick's neck.)

NICK

This? C'mon, don't you get it? I'm not just any angel, I'm Gabriel! (Nick blows a painful, toy-harmonica-like squeal from the trumpet.)

SHEILA

Jeez, Nick, do you have to? Warren, this is Nick, he's -

NICK

Really glad to meet you, Warren. Hey Stevie, ya got a towel? What's not on Warren here might get sticky and you don't want bugs.

(Stevie looks pitifully at Warren,
then ducks into the bathroom down
the hall as Sheila returns.)

SHEILA

(Looking at Warren)...and this guy looks buggy enough as it
is. Hey Ratso - you alright? That was a pretty spectacular
dive you took there.

WARREN

(Totally unaware) You were watching?

NICK

C'mon Sheila, go easy on him.

SHEILA

(Mockingly) Oh, so sorry, your holiness. Didn't know we were
chaperoned. C'mon, Ratso's a big boy -

WARREN

It's...it's Warren.

SHEILA

I know what I said. Anyway, he can handle himself, can't ya,
Warren?

WARREN

I...umm...yeah.

SHEILA

(laughing a little too loudly) Oh, Warren. You're such a
flirt.

STEVIE

(Returning with a bath towel) Sheila, really? You promised
you'd be good tonight.

SHEILA

(Feigning innocence) Honest, mommy, I'm gonna be a good
little devil.

STEVIE

Good. Then you can help me set up for the contest.

WARREN

Contest?

SHEILA

Ugh. Relax, Ratso, it's not a pie eating contest. Stevie does this ridiculous dance-off every year.

STEVIE

(Calmly explaining) It's been a tradition at these parties since my sister threw them back when I was too young to go and I had to spend all night at Aunt Beverly's. (Whispered through clenched teeth, almost growling, to Sheila) You know how much this means to me so help me have my fun!

SHEILA

Alright, alright, don't go all spinning-head-and-pea-soup on me. What do you want me to do before you pass out from all this excitement?

STEVIE

(Sighs.) Hand out the paper and pencils, ok? I'm gonna go make the announcement.

SHEILA

Whatever. C'mon, Ratso. Help a girl out.

WARREN

Uhhh...yeah, sure!

SHEILA

Relax, honey. It's not gonna be as exciting as feeding her rat, I'm sure.

(Stevie walks over to the stereo and carefully fades out the music and picks up a karaoke-style microphone plugged into the front.)

STEVIE

Good evening, all you groovie ghoulies!

(Stevie chuckles. No one seems to notice she's talking. Stevie turns up the mic a little, but still can't cut through the din of chatter)

Ummmmmm...Hello party people!

(Still nothing. Sheila notices that Stevie is struggling and may actually be on the verge of tears.)

SHEILA

(Top of her lungs) HEY.

(Dead silence as everyone turns to look at Sheila. She motions to Stevie.)

STEVIE

(Clearing her throat.) Thank you, Sheila. (Perking back up) Hello, my ghoulish guests! You know what time it is!

(Half the crowd seems genuinely annoyed. Of the rest, half are confused and the others are probably faking excitement.)

It's the big Hallowe'en dance contest! Annnnd...I've got a special prize for this year's winner!

PARTYGOER

(a voice from the crowd) What is it, no contest next year?

STEVIE

No, Mr. Comedian, and you have to dance if you want to find out! (Stevie pulls an envelope out from a drawer beneath the stereo and places it on the speaker, clearly indicating it's the prize she speaks of.) OK gang, if you wanna play along, just put your name on the slips that Sheila and Warren are handing out, and I'll pull them out of my cowboy hat. When your name is called, come over, pick a song, and show us what you've got! I'll be judging the winner!

PARTYGOER

(Another voice) We're all already judging you, Stevie.

WARREN

Hey, c'mon, everyone - it sounds like fun!

(Each head in the room slowly turns toward Warren.)

One by one, each guest seems to be suppressing laughter as every single one of them takes a slip of paper and begins passing around pencils and pens. Stevie is stunned.)

See? That's the spirit!

(Sheila rolls her eyes as Stevie takes off her hat and watches gleefully as so many slips of paper are tossed in. Everyone then clears space in the center of the room and awaits what comes next.)

OK, let the dance-off begin! Our first contestant is...

(Stevie tosses the slips around in her hat with her hand, then selects one and removes it.)

...Warren?

(The entire room laughs. Warren looks around nervously.)

WARREN

But I didn't...

SHEILA

Ya gotta do it, Ratso. Them's the rules. (She laughs and takes another bottle from her purse.)

(Stevie begins pulling slips from her hat. They all say "Warren," written in as many different hands as there are people in the room.)

STEVIE

(Frustrated) You guys...

NICK

No, it's ok - let him do it. C'mon, Warren. I think you can surprise them.

(A chant of "War-REN! War-REN!" begins filling the room. Nick smiles at him.)

Warren looks at Sheila, who's spiking another cup of punch while joining the chant and laughing. Before anyone can say anything else, Warren walks to the stereo and begins browsing through Stevie's MP3 player. Everyone cheers. Stevie crouches next to him.)

STEVIE

I'm sorry. You really don't have to. They're just being...

WARREN

...encouraging, it sounds like.

STEVIE

Oh, Warren...

WARREN

Just stand back.

(He turns up the volume on the panel, and hits Play. The unmistakable intro to "The Devil Went Down To Georgia" blares from the speakers to peals of laughter from the crowd. The intro continues as Stevie makes one more attempt to stop him.)

STEVIE

Warren, you don't have to do this! They're just jerks!

WARREN

(Tips an invisible stetson.) Don't you worry, ma'am.

(The first verse ends. Without missing a beat, Warren walks to the center of the room, puts his hands on his waist, and taps his foot, standing like a country-western singer, waiting.)

As the "Fire on the mountain" break begins in the song, Warren executes a perfectly-choreographed country line dance, complete with two-steps and fast turns. The partiers can't believe their eyes. They begin cheering and clapping along to the beat, right up to the point where the Devil in the song lays the fiddle on the ground. Warren walks up to Sheila, who's standing by Stevie, mouth agape. As Johnny taunts the Devil in the song, Warren offers his hand to Sheila again, who takes it as he pulls her back to the floor and begins a two-person version of this dance that Sheila seemingly just knows how to do. The partiers erupt as Warren invites them all to dance, and the living room briefly becomes a makeshift line dancing bar.

At the end, everyone cheers and pats Warren on the back. Stevie offers him a big hug and hands him the envelope, which he raises over his head like a cage fighter with a newly-won title belt. The crowd continues to cheer as he steps out to the porch to catch his breath. As he leans on the rail, he hears the door open behind him and Sheila steps out to join him outside.)

SHEILA

I gotta hand it to you, Ratso. You had me fooled.

WARREN

I did?

SHEILA

What the hell was that in there? At the punchbowl you could barely stand and swallow at the same time, but then out of nowhere you're Cotton-eyed Joe?

WARREN

Did you like it?

SHEILA

Like it? I couldn't believe it! It was...it was...

WARREN

Astonishing?

SHEILA

(She can't believe she's saying it.) ...sexy!

(Warren turns away.)

Alright, Travolta, what'd you win?

WARREN

(Opens the envelope and pulls out a clean, crisp fifty dollar bill. He's unimpressed.) Huh...fifty bucks.

SHEILA

WHOA. Last year I got a tiny plastic ghost full of Hershey Kisses.

WARREN

You won last year?

SHEILA

(shrugs) I dunno. Hardly anyone ever takes it seriously, so I'm that friend who keeps the host happy.

WARREN

You're a good friend, Sheila. (pause) Here. (He hands her the fifty.)

SHEILA

What? Warren, look - I don't know where you moved here from, but we don't have to pay each other to be friendly.

WARREN

No, c'mon - take it. You earned it as much as I did at the end. Besides, I don't really need it.

SHEILA

(Warily taking the bill, as she asks) What do you mean, you don't need it?

WARREN

(Sheepishly) Can I tell you a secret?

SHEILA

If you're rich too I'll kill you myself.

WARREN

(laughing) Not exactly. You see...some of us like to dress up like the devil...and some of us...

(Warren balls up what's left of the envelope, holds it up, and it disappears in a flash and a puff of smoke.)

SHEILA

How...how did...what are...

(Warren pulls back the hood of his costume, revealing two tiny horns protruding from his hair.)

WARREN

Don't you want to come home with me, Sheila?

(Sheila begins dreamily approaching Warren as though under a trance. The front door opens again, this time Nick joins the two devils on the porch.)

NICK

Wow, Warren - I'm impressed! That was some show you put on in there!

(Warren sees Nick standing with a Solo cup in his hand.)

Now don't you think it's time to come inside?

(Warren reaches for Sheila as Nick tosses the contents of the cup onto Warren. He screams as the liquid hits him, then vanishes in a flash of light. Sheila "comes to" as Stevie joins them on the porch.)

SHEILA

What the hell just happened?

STEVIE

What was that scream? Where's Warren?

NICK

I...took care of him.

SHEILA

(Looks at Nick, then at Stevie, then shakes her head) And here I thought you were crazy for inviting your family priest to a Hallowe'en party.

STEVIE

What? What is everyone talking about?

NICK

You...you invited a real-live demon to your party, Stevie. I sensed it when I picked him up off the floor. When I saw him outside with Sheila, I figured I needed to act quickly. You don't mind me blessing one cup of punch and turning into weaponized holy water, do you?

(Stevie looks woozy.)

SHEILA

Figures. The one guy here who isn't a meathead and who can actually dance turns out to be a demon. C'mon, lets get her inside.

(Sheila holds the door open as Nick puts his arm around Stevie, who stops him briefly.)

STEVIE

Wait.

NICK

What?

STEVIE

(pause, still woozy, then) Well now who's gonna feed Dexter!

BLACKOUT