

The Story Of Darling Brown

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Darling Brown: a socially awkward, bitter bullying victim with a silly name.

Hey there. So, my name is Darling. Darling Brown. As in, that's my actual name. As in, two grown adults had the choice of calling me *Darling* or any other name in the world, and they were like "Honey, what do you think of 'Darling' as a name?" "Nailed it, sugarplum!" My name is Darling Brown and here's my story.

So I'm a twin. God obviously thought this face was too good to squander on just one person. As first born, mum and dad for some mystical reason thought Darling would make an appropriate name for a human being. Want to know what they called my twin? Jessie. That's awkward, wouldn't-give-your-dog-this-name "Darling" and ordinary, perfectly-acceptable "Jessie".

I've had a number of theories over the years as to why I got called Darling. A pretty good one is that my parents were trying to answer the question of how a person's name affects their choices in life, with me as the variable and Jessie as the control. This theory isn't too bad because Jessie and I are *very* different people. The other theory I like is that my parents are complete sociopaths whose very existence proves that you should need some kind of license before you're allowed to breed. You want to know the worst thing? Their names are Claire and John. Why would people with perfectly normal names call their child "Darling"?

If we're going with the social experiment theory, the first time our names ever really differentiated us was in year two. I dodged the bullet in kindy and year one, but in year two my teacher Ms Ahmed screwed everything for me. She's reading through the class role for the first time and she's like, "Andrea? *Hi* Andrea. Catherine? *Hi* Catherine. Darling? *Daarling*?!"

Let me assure you there is nothing more scarring than being laughed at by a room full of eight year olds. Not only did I have the stupid name but everyone called me by it the way Ms Ahmed did. "*Daarling*," they said. *Daarling. Daarling Daarling Daarling*. Jessie was in the same class and of course took the cue to disown me when that happened. "Us? Siblings? Brown's a common surname."

It all started right there in year two. Jessie was normal and I became the outsider. Genetically identical but socially opposite. PS fuck you Ms Ahmed.

No matter what I did, those cold and heartless eight year olds didn't want to be my friend so I did the only thing I could think of to fit in. I pretended to be Jessie. This was pretty easy to pull off – our voices and appearances are identical.

But the world didn't need more than one Jessie Brown. Jessie found out about the impersonation after a couple of days and we ended up having a very public argument about our respective identities which culminated in an equally public fist fight. Have any of you guys seen *Fight Club*? Twins having a punch up must look pretty ridiculous, like Edward Norton hitting himself in the head in *Fight Club*. Anyways, it ended with *me* getting in massive trouble with Ms Ahmed (fucking cow), the principal and our parents. Jessie just got a sympathetic squeeze on the arm.

High school was *way* worse. Can you imagine the teasing? Jessie fit in just as well as anyone else but I was the pariah and only got the dregs as friends. Not that some of those dregs weren't nice enough people, but they were the dregs and by association I too was dregs. I was a loser with losers as friends.

Fine. If I was forced to be the dreggy loser then at least I could be the smart one. I tried extra hard at school but Jessie was competitive and we got similar grades thanks to having the same brain. I tried sport but sucked at it; must have been the low confidence and self-esteem. After years of searching for superiority the only thing I clearly had over Jessie was my aptitude at video games. Great – what a fulfilling life that would lead to.

After school I thought things would get better. I could choose my own social circles and people had matured and were less likely to put my head in a toilet, urinal, sanitary waste bin etcetera. I could be whoever I wanted now.

But the damage had already been done. I went to a different university to Jessie – for obvious reasons – and we both ended up at the same party one night. Jessie was all like [*Darling imitates Jessie, confident, chatty, friendly, popular*], and I was all like [*Darling is Darling now, awkward, alone in the corner, bitter at having no friends*]. That's a pretty good impersonation of Jessie by the way.

I couldn't go out without thinking everyone was talking to me. The number of times people have said "Hello Darling" and I've done the whole turn-my-head-and-say-"Yeah?" thing. Then there's always the same awkward conversation: "Sorry, my name's Darling and I thought you were talking to me." "Your name's *Daarling*?" "Yeah, my name's *Daarling*." "Wow, your parents must have been complete sociopaths." "Pretty much."

So that was it. Thanks to my stupid parents calling me Darling and Ms Ahmed's inability to be a human being, I was screwed for life.

Naturally I asked my parents why they gave me this crippling name. You know what they told me? They told me it was because "I was so dear to them." I told them they'd ruined my life and I was going to change it to, I dunno, something from Game of Thrones or something. Mum had such a fit of hysterics she ended up in hospital – now I'm too guilty to bring it up again.

I tried a new strategy when I was in my mid-twenties. I tried to *own* my name. You know that woman from YouTube? Sweet Brown? "I got bronchitis. Ain't nobody got time for that." Does anyone give her grief because her name's "Sweet"? No, they don't. Do you think that after months of casually dropping my name as "Darling" and *daring* people to judge me that they actually take me seriously? Not a damned chance!

Darling has become worked up and frustrated. Takes a deep breath to regain his/her composure.

Look, I'm going to skip past the hundred other stories about why my name ruined my life and tell you how this whole experiment ended. I managed to make a friend called Rupert – can you believe that? – and we were walking to the local shops on a sunny September afternoon. It's a pretty epic story so listen close.

So I'm walking along with Rupert and he's like, "It's unseasonably warm for this time of the year isn't it Darling?", because he's a fucking grand master

conversationalist. I'm like "I guess so", because sadly I'm not much better. "It's been an average of three point six degrees warmer this week than the average September weather over the past fifteen years," Rupert says.

I'm trying to think of a better response than "Yeah", but all of a sudden something catches my eye across the road. It looks like a holdup at the newsagency. A guy with a stocking over his head is holding a pipe or something and threatening the shop assistant.

I hesitate for *one* second then start sprinting towards the newsagency. It's a primal sprint, like I'm the cheetah chasing down the gazelle. My subconscious for some reason is saying, "Jessie would never do this. Jessie would *never* intervene in a holdup."

The robber looks over in surprise just as I leap into the air towards him with such conviction that my body goes completely horizontal. Two seconds after we hit the ground I have his crowbar and I'm whaling on him, smash smash smash smash smash! I end up breaking both his wrists, his left tibia and five of his ribs.

This was as much a surprise to me as it was for Rupert, the robber and the newsagent. I've *never* had that much adrenaline pumping through me in my *life*. In fact I'd say it was a lifetime's supply of adrenaline hitting me all at once. After I finished beating the poor guy up a couple of police cars arrived and I was interviewed for about fifty times longer than the whole ordeal went for. The newsagent said I was quote unquote "a total fucking hero" and long story short I got on the front page of the local paper with the headline "Brown Turns Thief's Day Black." Not "Our Darling Saves The Day", but "Brown Turns Thief's Day Black." They only mentioned my first name once and didn't include a single pun on it. It was almost like... I had a normal name.

So I thought a lot about this incident in the months after it happened and I know why it happened. I knew that Jessie would never do what I did – not in a hundred years. I made a split-second decision to do something that golden child Jessie Brown would never have done. I had to have more than "video game aptitude" to my name. I had to be "Darling Brown, the total hero."

I wouldn't have done that if my parents had given me a normal name. Jessie would have just run away like a chicken. That's what I would have done if my name was Jessie. I'm a hero *because* my name is Darling. Darling Brown

Well... if I had to sum all of this up, I guess all I can say would be... I guess, at the end of the day... I kind of love my stupid parents.