

Sometimes I just want to be alone. Know what I mean? It's good. Gives you a chance to think. I don't like hanging out with other people all the time. I need space. So you can imagine how I feel when Dad tells me Sharon's having a baby.

"A baby?" I say. "But babies make noise. And they puke."

"You're getting a new sibling!" Dad says. "It'll be great!"

"Where's it going to sleep?"

"There's plenty of room," he says. "Plenty of room."

A lie, and he knows it.

So far in our house there's me and Dad and Sharon. She's been around almost a year now. I like Sharon. She's nice.

Then there's Uncle Adam. He sleeps in the spare room. He's not a real uncle, but he's been with us so long we call him one.

Uncle Don is a real uncle. He sleeps on the couch in the lounge. "Just till he gets back on his feet," Dad said. "Finds a place of his own." That was five months ago.

Sarah and Sam live in the sleepout. They're not related at all, but Dad treats them like part of the family. Sarah is the daughter of Dad's friend on Great Barrier. Sam is her boyfriend. They're finding their feet, too.

Things are no better at Mum's. There's Mum and her girlfriend, Tracey, and at weekends, when I visit, there's also Tracey's four kids: Anita, Alwyn, Ariana, and Angela. Mum says it's quieter during the week.

Now there'll be a baby.

After Dad tells me, I look up sibling in the dictionary: "each of two or more children or offspring having one or both parents in common; a brother or sister". Brother or sister – that doesn't sound like many options to me.

"Sibling" I write in my notebook. Then "Binslig", "Gilsbin", "Singlib", "Bisglin", "Nigslib", and "Igsnilb". Beside the names, I draw pictures – alien babies with extra-large heads, six arms, and four eyes. Binslig has an enormous howling mouth. Igsnilb has a trunk instead of a nose.

It's a shame the baby doesn't qualify as a step-sibling because then I could have called it Pest-Binslig, which in my opinion just about sums it up. I add the name to the list anyhow. Pest-Binslig is green with five antennae and a rubbish bin for a body.

Before the baby's born, the level of excitement in our house becomes unbearable. Dad and Sharon act like they've won the pokies. When they aren't cooing over pictures of cots and prams in catalogues, they're endlessly discussing baby names. Their ideas are way too cute.

"What about BJ?" I suggest one evening. "Or JB? Or how about Binslig?"

They ignore me. I go to my room for some quiet time. Fat chance of that. Uncle Adam and Uncle Don are hosting a full-moon drumming circle outside my window. Men only. Sam's part of the circle. Sarah's supporting on tambourine from the sleepout.

I think about my poor sibling. Who's going to hear it when it cries?

When the baby's born, I stay with Mum and Tracey for a few days. It's a boy, and even Mum's acting like his arrival is earth-shattering news.

"Stop sulking," she says. "You'll love him when you see him. Wait and see."

"Binslig," I say under my breath. "Gilsbin."

"What are you muttering about?" Mum asks.

"Just practising nursery rhymes," I say. "For the baby."

Dad picks me up after school to visit Sharon and the baby in hospital. I take my time getting ready. Then, when we're halfway there, I suddenly remember I've left my homework sheet at school.

"We'll miss visiting hours," says Dad.

"My homework's due tomorrow."

So we go all the way back.







Unfortunately, it's just more time for Dad to rave on. "Wait till you see his hands," he says. "They're so tiny. And his hair. So soft! And he smells like fresh bread and flowers and sunshine, all rolled into one. Scrum-dish-o-licious!"

Scrum-dish-o-licious? Is that a word?

At the hospital, Dad parks the car, and we take the lift to the maternity ward. Everyone's there, and they all grin when I come in. Sharon's in the middle of it all, sitting up in bed. She's wearing her pink onesie with rabbits on it. By the window is a cot – not a flash, wooden one, like in the catalogues, but a plain hospital one.

"He's asleep," says Sharon.



Dad places a hand on my shoulder. "Take a look," he says. He goes to sit by Sharon, and I go and look in the cot.

The cot's quite big, and the baby's very small. I have to lean a long way over to get a proper look. When I do, it's not his smell I think about, or how cute he is, or his hands, or his hair ... or any of the other million things Dad mentioned in the car. What I think about is all the names. They bounce round in my head, trying to claim top spot. Blignis, Gilsbin, Singlib, Bisglin, Nigslib, and Igsnilb. None of them seems right, so when I lean even further into the cot, I just whisper, "Hello, baby."

He's not asleep; he's just pretending, and he blinks when I speak. He has his head turned towards the others, so I explain who they are. Backwards. "That's Nod," I say. "Mada, Haras, Mas, Norahs, Dad, Alegna, Anaira, Nywla, Atina, Yecart, and Mum. My mum, not yours. But you don't need to worry about any of them. You just need to worry about me."

The baby turns his head towards me, and although his eyes are sort of cross-eyed and watery, I'm sure he sees me. I stretch one finger down and touch his hand, and his fingers unfurl, then clamp over mine like an anemone.

I lean in even further until my face is only centimetres from his. Now I can smell him, and Dad's right – he is scrum-dish-o-licious.

"You can sleep in with me," I say.



## **Plenty of Room**

by Sarah Johnson

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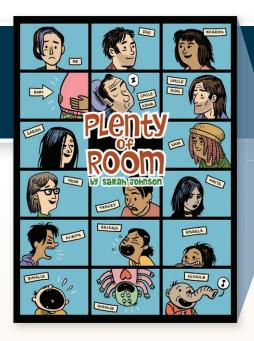
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