

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", "Niglib", 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.



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. “Once you get home. There’s plenty of room.”

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DYLAN HORROCKS**



# Plenty of Room

by Sarah Johnson

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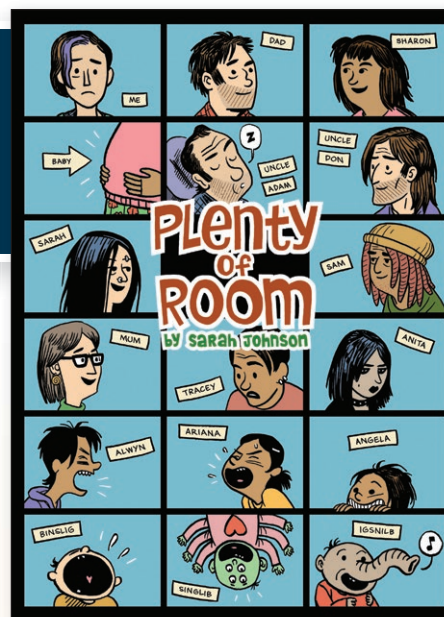
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