

**The Baby Brother Support Group**

**Word count: 1483**

The Little Critters Daycare is just like any other daycare center. A team of generally amiable employees watches over thirty or so children ranging in age from one to four years old while the kids' parents work, or go to school, or just sit in a darkened room and enjoy a few moments of peaceful silence. And just like any other daycare across the country, a grassroots organization exists within Little Critters, created to address the concerns of a vulnerable population: The Baby Brother Support Group. What is the Baby Brother Support Group, you ask? Simply put, the brotherhood provides trauma counseling, much needed male camaraderie, and general support services to any baby brother who wants to join. A common enemy unites them; a foe that goes by many names but is most often called "sister".

Baby Brother Support Groups are underground resistances forces. They meet whenever they can wherever they can; snack tables, finger paint stations, dark corners of playgrounds, all have served as impromptu lodges for the baby brotherhood. Little Critters happens to have an elaborate network of playground equipment that allows for a number of secluded meeting places. For as long as anyone could remember, though, the group had met in the hollow space beneath the slide platform. This hollow provides the best combination of privacy and security for the brotherhood: a solid roof that only lets through a little light, three walls that partially hide the hollow from the rest of the playground (consisting of a tic-tac-toe board, a giant abacus, and a cartoon map of the United States in case you're wondering), and a floor carpeted in sand because sand is fun to sit on.

In order to better understand the organization, let's eavesdrop on today's meeting of the Baby Brotherhood Support Group at Little Critters.

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"That's twice this week."

“I know it is, Elliott.”

“I mean, why don’t they just step in and put an end to her abuse?”

“I wish I had an answer for you, but in my experience these incidents fall outside any logical jurisdiction. You could cling to your Mom all day long, and it wouldn’t matter. Sisters can wait. We all know they have magic powers; they can manipulate the minds of grownups. For better or worse, we are alone... now, what color did you say the dress was again?”

“Lapis.”

“That’s like purple, right?”

“No. It’s not *like* purple. It’s lapis. She was very clear about that.”

“And the length? Floor length?”

“No, it was shorter, like down to my knees.”

“I see. Elliott, you might not want to hear this, but I’m starting to think your parents don’t believe your sister is abusing you at all. In fact, they seem to like it when she dresses you up like a girl. Tell me, do they take pictures with their phones when it happens?”

“I, I don’t know. They do laugh a lot.”

“It’s worse than I’d feared. We may even be talking YouTube territory here. I’m sorry my friend.”

“So am I, Sebastian. So am I.”

After a few seconds of contemplation, Elliott and Sebastian scoot back to their seats against the walls of the hollow. A ginger-haired boy speaks up: “Your sister’s behavior is actually normal for a six year old girl. She has chosen to express her affection for you by taking you under her wing. She wants you to be one of the girls. According to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development...”

“Shut up Parker! Just shut up. We get it, okay? You’re in the gifted program. We don’t want to hear anything else about this Pee-jay guy or his theories.”

“I’m simply stating that while your sister’s over exuberance may at times be frightening, her actions are based solely on her love for you.”

“Right, so she’s trying to love me to death? Why are you even here, Parker?”...

Parker begins to respond, but something else catches his attention. “Wh—did you guys hear that?”

They did, but none of them want to acknowledge it. They hope it is an anomaly, one of the other daycare kids, or maybe a car passing in the distance, nothing to be afraid of. A tense moment passes while the brothers sit in silence, straining to hear anything out of the ordinary. Finally a sound carries towards them softly on the breeze. It is the singsong refrain they’ve been conditioned to fear:

“Ooooh baby brother! Where are yooooou?”

“Shhhh!” Elliott raises a finger to his lips then whispers, “Be absolutely silent. Don’t move a muscle.”

The brothers sit stiller than any group of boys has ever sat before. Their eyes darting here and there, looking for any hint of the approaching danger. They listen. The refrain arises on the breeze once more, much closer this time.

“Ooooh baby brother! Where are yooooou?”

“Oh crud, it’s Mia.” says Elliott.

Elliott’s sister, Amelia, was something of a legend among the baby brothers. A lanky, unassuming girl, Amelia appeared filled with all the nice sugar and spice of a fairy princess; at least, that is, until she got her hands on you. Then you realized too late that this little blonde girl

was in fact made of coiled steel and, like a wildebeest caught on the jaws of a crocodile, you had little say in what was about to happen.

But don't think for a moment that Amelia had a mean-spirited hair on her head. Quite the opposite; she loved everything and everyone with every fiber of her being, especially her baby brother Elliott and, by proxy, the rest of the baby brotherhood. Problems arose because of how forcefully she expressed her love. What Amelia considered playtime with her friends, Elliott and the others regarded as warfare.

The brothers know it is only a matter of time until she finds them. No one could predict what would happen after that, but the brothers vow to be prepared for whatever mayhem Amelia will unleash.

The refrain had stopped, replaced by an eerie calm—the eye of hurricane Mia. The brothers glance cautiously through any nearby openings in the hollow; nothing outside but the other daycare kids. A trickle of sand falls through the cracks in the ceiling and vanishes into the floor of the hollow. Is someone using the slide? Is Amelia right on top of them? No one knows. A palpable relief can be felt in the hollow as two kids shoot off the end of the slide and run across the playground.

A shadow flickers behind the brothers while they look through the cracks at the kids who had scared them on the slide. They turn to investigate the shadow and freeze.

“Boo! I gotcha!” Amelia yells while hanging upside down halfway off the platform that doubles as the hollow's roof.

Pandemonium ensues. The meeting unofficially adjourns and all the brothers' vows and plans are instantly abandoned to fear.

In a blur of giggles and squeals, Amelia descends upon the Baby Brother Support Group. The brothers scatter, squeezing through openings in the walls, slipping out the main entrance behind Amelia, Parker starts digging his way out of the hollow, but to no avail. Many brothers manage to escape; those that don't must endure the terrifyingly well-intentioned hugs and kisses and songs of Amelia, accompanied by a loudness that is unique to six-year-old girls, amplified by the natural acoustics of the hollow. After a minute or so, Amelia remembers why she was sent. She picks up Elliott from behind, carrying him away from the playground the way a strongman might carry a tree trunk.

“Amelia, put your brother down. He doesn't like that.”

“It's okay Mom,” Amelia says as she adjusts her grip on her squirming brother.

“He told me he likes for me to carry him.”

“Here, I'll carry him. Ready to head home Elliott?”

As his mother carries him away, Elliott stares back over her shoulder at his brothers. Each of them nods to him in turn as if to say, “Solidarity brother. We will be strong together.”

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Unfortunately, many Baby Brotherhood meetings end in this way. The organization is necessarily underground, a resistance force without any ally. The brothers can't organize any further since they aren't allowed to use the Internet or phone unsupervised. No one can write yet, or even read for that matter (except Parker the ginger-haired gifted kid). Even if their parents could understand them, none would believe that big sisters are in fact the single greatest threat to little brothers. So, friends, please say a prayer for these tiny warriors, for this band of baby brothers, and join me as I recite the official pledge of the Baby Brother Support Group:

*Though we must flail,*

*Scream, kick, and holler,*

*We'll never forget*

*That we shall grow taller,*

*But until that bright day*

*When we'll win the fight,*

*Let us join and be strong*

*Baby brother unite!*