

"Baby Teeth"
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The baby has no teeth.

This occurs to you as you watch him, flailing in his crib, tiny arms and legs churning like he's treading water. He gums at you, blinks blue eyes, then churns some more. I'm drowning, he seems to say, dolefully. Do something. You nod as your mother explains what to do if he cries. Pick him up and walk around with him. Put a pillow over his face. Rub his back. Press down.

It's not that you hate the baby. I mean, sure, he cries at ungodly hours and you have to explain to your teachers why you can't stay awake in class, and sure, he smells and you're pretty sure that the stench is oozing onto all of your clothes, all of your possessions and soon everything will smell like him but- oh god. What if he goes? What if you have to change his diaper? You did not sign up for this. You will not change that baby's diaper, no matter what your mom says. What's the worst that can happen? Diaper rash?

Sure enough, there she goes, your mom, pointing to a stack of Pampers and repositioning the baby powder so you can see it better. Fat chance. She could put the baby powder right in front of your nose, right there in your freakin' hand - you still wouldn't change that baby's diaper. You're not going to tell her this; of course you're not. She'll just lecture you. This way, you can pretend it's an accident when she comes home. Oops, you'll say. I didn't even notice.

She looks tired, you realize, your mom does. She's pushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "Got it?"

Got it. Roger that. You're leaving me alone with the freakin' baby?

She needs a break. You know this. She knows this. Maybe the little monster knows

this, still churning over there in the crib, pounding his gums together like a freakin' shark. Chomp, chomp.

Now she's gone, and the baby's crying. He's stopped chomping the air and churning, which was kind of cute because you could pretend that he was drowning. Now he's sobbing. It's like he's throwing all of his effort into it too, his little red face getting redder and redder and purple, his little tooth-less gums stretched to their limits, for maximum scream capacity. "WAAAAH." So freakin' annoying. You just want him to shut up.

You can't remember what your mom told you to do when he cries. The room is this ugly pale yellow color, like some kind of totally weak lemon, or maybe a custard or something. Stupid unisex colors. The yellow is making your head hurt, or maybe it's the screaming. Stupid baby.

So you leave him alone. You go for a walk. Hey, it's not that big a deal - I mean, he'll tire himself out soon anyway, right? He's just screaming and screaming so probably no one would be stupid enough even to kidnap him, but you lock the door just in case, and also because you'd be really pissed if someone took the baby and your Xbox.

Except, after a few blocks you can still hear his screaming ringing in your ears, like a Walkman that's broken and stuck on repeat. And then you start to worry. What if some sort of baby murderer comes along? Oh god. Are there even baby murderers? Of course there are baby murderers. There's all kinds of murderers, so of course there's baby murderers. Oh god - your baby brother is about to get murdered by a baby murderer and then you'll get murdered by your mom.

You start running back to the house. It's too late. You know it. The door is gaping open, the baby murderer is already gone. The baby is dead, the police are coming.

Your neighbor called them - not the young guy who just moved in next door, but the old lady who lives across the street. You know, the one who used to make you snickerdoodles? She's never going to make you another snickerdoodle. Ever. You've blown it, man. You got your baby brother murdered and no more snickerdoodles. Oh man. This sucks. You are such dead meat.

But when you get home, the door is locked. What if the baby murderer is still in there? You stop for a moment - should you risk it, go in and risk your life for the freakin' crying baby in his freakin' gender-neutral room? He is your brother, even though he's all toothless and cry-y. And hey, snickerdoodles. They're freakin' good snickerdoodles. Plus, baby murderers only murder babies, right?

Except when you get to the baby's room, there's no baby murderer. There's just the squirming little baby and he's still screaming. Part of you is impressed, like "damn check out the lungs on this kid," but most of you is pissed off. Now you're sweaty from running home and you're out of breath and your head is pounding and the kid is just here, not even getting murdered, just screaming.

So you pick him up. You're trying to figure out if you're allowed to slap a baby, but you don't think so, and you're pretty sure that shaking him will kill him. Like a toy poodle. You can't shake toy poodles. So you can't slap him and you can't shake him, so how's this kid ever going to learn? And he's screaming and squirming and you think damn I'm going to drop this freakin' baby and he'll crack his skull and grow up dumb. You don't want to have a dumb brother. You'd better hold on tight.

So you hold him tighter and he seems to quiet down a little bit, kind of hiccuping like he's tired of crying. Finally. You remember now that your mom said to walk

around with him, and to rub his back. So you start to walk but just when you're about to rub his back, the little bastard bites you.

No freakin' teeth and the little jerk has the audacity to bite you and the worst part is that it actually hurts. He's got some kind of bite force, this kid does, and you almost drop him or shake him or slap him or all three, but instead you just pull the little freak off of your shoulder and plop him down in his crib.

He's quiet now, just staring at you through the bars of the crib, the same crib that you probably used when you were a freakin' toothless baby. He's got these big blue eyes and he's staring at you, all calm, like all he wanted was to bite you and now that he's done that he's totally cool. A freakin' baby, and all he wanted to do was chomp on your shoulder, no big deal. In fact, he seems kinda happy about it, like he's freakin' pleased with himself. He gurgles a little and starts doing that thing again, that drowning/shark thing where he churns his arms and chomps at the air with those gums. Chomp, chomp.

When your mom finally gets home, you've got a wicked headache and you're sleeping with your head on the bars of the crib. He's sleeping too, and he's sucking on your hair where it sticks through the bars, getting it all baby-spit-y and gross.

But your mom thinks it's cute - she laughs and that's what wakes you up and you smack your head on the top of the crib. THWACK. Ouch. You rub your head and get baby-spit on your hand and your mom laughs again. "Did you boys have fun?"

You decide to go the sarcastic route. "Oh yeah," you say, "oodles of it."

"Good." She actually thinks you were serious.

And the baby chomps in his sleep, almost as if he agrees.