



Brother Zone

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GADFLY

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For
Bren and Tristy
&
brothers
everywhere

PERSONAL NOTE

This book covers a year in the life of two brothers, aged five and seven, who love and fight with equal intensity. It's an exploration of how language is actually used in family life.

Until you have kids, it isn't really possible to understand how wonderful and terrible being a parent is. Nothing prepares you for the first tooth / word / steps, or for the first fratricidal moment of rage—the *'he started it!'* that shatters the cozy domestic dream.

We are natural and professional linguists—obsessed with words—and have always talked to the boys about them. In this book, we have tried to strike a balance between linguistics conventions and literary ones, so that we can better capture and present how we use language as a family in a way that's both rigorous and easy to read.

We're a mixed family: part Irish, British, and American, with a dash of Cherokee, French, Swiss, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian thrown in. Lots of enchiladas, too.

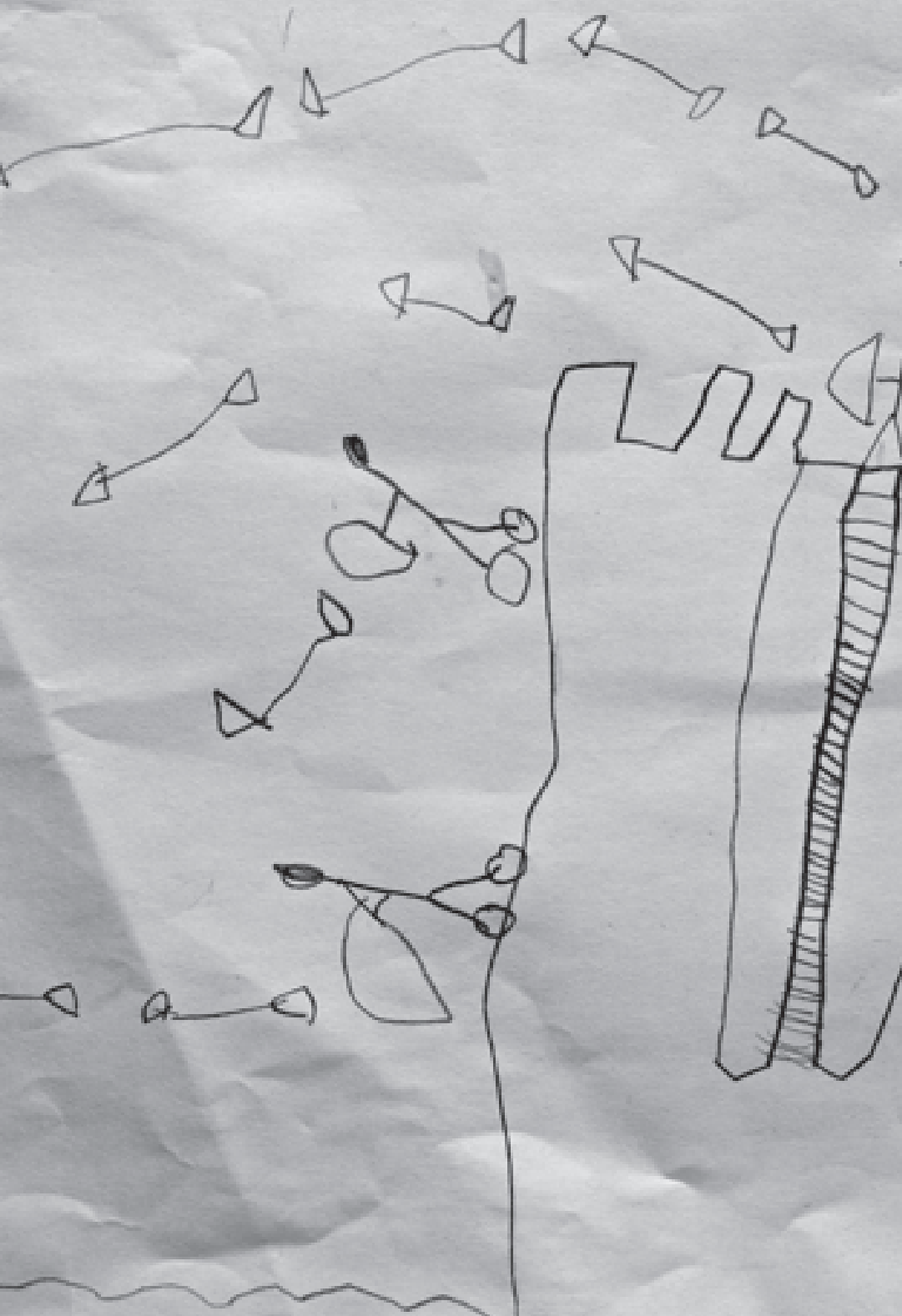
And we're us.

Martyn & Mary

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FRONT LINES

Hunched over their maps, two generals plan campaigns. They arrange their armies. The rug is rucked and wrinkled with great care. The terrain is mountainous, populated with goats and flowers.

The generals agree, after 4 arguments and rolling the dice, whose team is The Goodies: silent men, uniformly grey, standing in long, grim, lines. The Goodies fight with honor. The Baddies hide under covers, furniture, behind the door. Virulent, poisonous, they have no scruples.

Wings flap. Bodies flail. Planes fall from the sky. Snakes hiss. Men scream.

The Baddies, ably led by Medusa, several Decepticons, and Polyphemus, defeat the modern warriors who bomb them from stealth planes. Even the snipers, belatedly adopting enemy tactics and hiding in the folds of the rug, are found and eaten.

"Next time,"

shrieks General 1, stomping off,

"I'm being The Baddies!"

PETER PAWN AND TRANNY BELL

*"I am NOT being a lady,
Brendan. You do Tinkerbell
AND Wendy! I have enough
guys to do!"*

*"You are only doing Peter Pan,
the Lost Boys, and Indians.
That's not too many parts."*

*"Well, I just don't want
to be a girl."*

Tristan doesn't usually argue about assigned roles. He is happy to be anyone, as long as Brendan is willing to play with him. I think of him as Peter Pawn, the star of a play cursed, like Macbeth, which never goes according to plan, and always ends in actors walking off.

Brendan likes being Tranny Bell (as I now think of him) and Wendy. Swanning around in a black and silver dress, he is too distracted to continue the play. Jumping off the couch (trans.: flying over Neverland) is more fun when you are wearing sequins, and flecks of light bounce and scatter on the walls. Peter Pawn threatens to stab Tranny Bell if

*"she doesn't just do what
she is supposed to do."*

The play ends abruptly.

*"If you can't control
your behaviour,*

*Tristan, I am NOT
doing this show."*

Flounce, flounce, flourish: Peter Pawn is abandoned on-stage. Captain Hook—aka Big Cushion—soon buys it.

—Fin—

COFFEE

Brendan has gone skipping down the icy street to play with a friend, ecstatic: Tristan has not been invited. Tristan offers to make the coffee

*“without spilling any of
the beans”*

because

*“you look thirsty
and tired.”*

I fall for it. I have a cold. Then,

*“EEEEEW, Mom. This
hot chocolate powder
smells like cat litter.”*

Hot chocolate? Who said anything about hot chocolate? Turns out he wants to make me espresso with milk and chocolate powder. I give in.

*“EEEEW. This seriously
smells like cat litter!”*

*“Are you sure it smells
like cat litter?”*

*“Uh huh. It smells
totally disgusting. I don’t
want to eat it out of the
jar now.”*

Aha! Now I know why I am being coerced into having choco-coffee.

“Maybe...

[snidely]

*...it is your breath you are
smelling?”*

Tristan cups his hands, coughs into them, sniffs.

*“Hey! It IS my breath that
smells vomity. I’m gonna
have some chocolate powder
after all. Thanks, Mom!”*

I make the espresso myself. Tristan gloats about how angry Brendan is going to be when he

*“gets back and I tell him you let me
eat LOADS of chocolate mix.”*

ELECTRIFYING DUMPLINGS

“Electrifying.”

“What?”

*“You know... zzzz...
bzzz... zzzz,”*

with cheeks and eyes flicking from side to side.

*“It tastes sort of electrifying.
Which means zingy and not
too good. I don’t think I like
soy sauce after all.”*



BREAD MAN OF LEITH WALK

*“Mom, can I choose the bread?
Can I use the pinchers? I’ll race
you!”*

I find him hanging from the shelf, tongue out, wrestling a pistole with the tongs. He shouts, triumphantly waving one small loaf:

“get a paper bag!”

Before I can open a bag, a man with white hair, bulging eyes, and black NHS specs lunges past, grabs the last 3 rolls out of the bin, and staggers away like Quasimodo, flour covering his blue anorak.

*“Did he just steal my bread, Mom?
That crazy Grandad just stealed
my bread!”*

*“I think he did, Tristy. We’ll
have to choose something else.”*

*“That guy was weird, Mom.
Is he from your hospital?”*

*“I don’t know, honey.
Probably not.”*

“Can the police catch him?”

*“No, not unless he didn’t
pay, and runs over a cop on
his way out of here.”*

Birdwatching, trainspotting, bread-pinching, and other grown-up crimes are not strictly punishable. Tristan finds this odd. Bread is bread. He decides to choose some other bread, muttering

*“freaks will go to jail if I am
in charge when I grow up.”*

I hope for Bread Man’s sake that he is on his way to the airport.