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### VASSAR I

I lay there, my quilt pulled far over my head, my tears moistening the pillow. Over and over in my mind like a scratched record, the conversation that had just transpired repeated itself. Tightly, I pulled the covers around my ears as if it would insulate me from those words. I did not want to hear it anymore, but I was helpless. . .

"Your stepmother is pregnant", he had said. And as if the stupified expression on my face meant that I did not understand, he added, "She's going to have a baby." My father was glowing, it never having occurred to him that this news would bring me anything but the great joy that it had brought him.

I still vividly remember that night of over six years ago, when an eleven year old child lay crying in his bed, unable to comprehend why his father and stepmother felt it so necessary to add to their trio, yet overwhelmingly aware of the changes that it would make in his life.

A lot has changed since then. I am seventeen now and the baby which my father and I spoke of on that distant evening has become my five year old brother Emile. The normal feelings of jealousy have long since been replaced by an unbreakable bond of brotherly love.

From the first days after Emile was brought home from the hospital, I began to experience emotions that I had never felt before. My parents and I were close, but it was a different kind

of love that I felt for my brother. They could take care of themselves, but here was a small human that had no ability to protect himself. I saw myself as the fulfiller of this task. And there was another emotion, an emotion which is difficult to explain. It was a feeling of relationship which I had never felt before. The bond between all of my other immediate relatives (parents and grandparents) and myself stemmed from the fact that they had helped to make me, but here was someone that was in fact made of the same "stuff" as me.

Now, Emile and I are the perfect playmates. He needs someone (unlike his parents) who is able to keep up with him and I, being a child at heart, am eager to participate in all of the activities of a five year old. Recently, he has become fascinated with Robin Hood and he and I are frequently to be found jumping around the house, sword fighting and acting out scenes. He is actually quite good and keeps me on my toes. Like all little kids, he loves fireworks and, being similarly inclined, I have a large supply. He and I often go outside and explode things ranging from tomatoes to dog poop (not my idea). A couple of weeks ago, Emile discovered my model rockets in the attic and had to see them launched. I was only too glad to oblige him as it was a hobby I had greatly enjoyed and had not done for a while. We are perfect for each other; I do with him the things he needs an adult to do but which bore most adults, and he does with me the things that most of my friends claim they are too old to do.

Emile has also taught me a great deal about children. I had thought that I hated all kids. My father is a pediatrician and,

having spent time in his office, I was exposed to what seemed like millions of screaming infants and toddlers. To me, at age 12, it appeared that if it was under age 11, it had no redeeming value. By spending time with Emile, I have been allowed to see the special times in childhood development that cannot truly be experienced any way other than first hand. Nothing can compare to seeing a child smile for the first time, take his first steps, or the greatest joy of all, hearing him first speak your name, no matter how distorted it may be. These experiences changed my views about children, showing me that the good drastically outweighs the bad. Sad as it may seem, I used to scowl at strange children who doddered into my path when I was out in public. Now I smile, pat them on the head, and walk around them, doing my best not to interfere with the vast intake of knowledge that they are experiencing at every moment. So, although I must admit that at this point I do not know if I want to have children myself, I can say for sure that Emile has opened my eyes about these tiny humans which we call children.

As I lay in my bed on that evening of over six years ago, and on many evenings that followed, I would daydream. I would imagine all the things that I would change if I could go back in time and alter the past. Without a doubt, the first change would be my stepmother's pregnancy. I was a frightened little boy who had spent his whole life being the only child. To me the effects that a new child would have were obvious: there would be two separate children sharing what once had been all mine. So, there could only be one half of the parental love and attention for each. I

now know how wrong I was. I have seen that having two children in no way means that a parent's love must be divided. But Emile has also shown me another factor that I had not considered, that two siblings can draw on and learn from each other, having their own relationship totally independent of parental relationships. I still lie awake in bed sometimes wishing I could change things in the past, but my brother's birth is never one of those things.