

# The Age-Hog

by Jenna Brotsky

Leah was a little girl, but she had a lot of big things in her life. She had a big imagination. She had a big box of crayons, with 64 colors and a sharpener in the back. She liked to use the big box of crayons to draw big pictures. But most importantly of all, Leah had a big sister. Her name was Jamie, and she was three whole years older than Leah.



Leah and Jamie were very different even though they were sisters. Jamie had straight, light brown hair. Leah had curly hair that was such a dark brown it was almost black. Both sisters liked chocolate cake, but Jamie would always eat her cake in neat, dainty bites. Leah would eat big, sloppy bites, and sometimes she was so excited that she forgot to use a fork. When Jamie used the hammock in their backyard, she lay down quietly and read. Leah liked to stand up in the hammock, rock back and forth, and pretend she was surfing. If Jamie had friends over, they liked to be princesses having a tea party. Leah liked to be the dragon that interrupted.

But to Leah, the most important difference of all was that Jamie was three years older. That didn't seem like such a big difference to grown ups. Leah's parents and grandparents and other adults were always saying things like, "Soon you'll learn to read, too," or "You'll catch up in no time." But they were wrong. Leah couldn't catch up at all. Jamie was always three years ahead!

Those extra three years of age meant Jamie got to do so much more than her sister. Jamie learned how to ride a bike without training wheels, but Mom and Dad said Leah wasn't ready to do the same. Jamie went to first grade and learned how to read all by herself, but Leah still had to ask to hear her favorite stories. And worst of all, Jamie got to stay up half an hour after Leah went to bed. A whole thirty minutes! What was she doing when Leah was asleep? Having a party? Playing games with Mom and Dad? It wasn't fair.

And not only did Jamie get to do more than Leah did, she got to do everything first. Leah's preschool teachers had already taught Jamie, and sometimes they accidentally called Leah by her big sister's name. Leah once fell in the park and lost one of her baby teeth. She lost one before any of her friends did, but Jamie had already lost five teeth! Every birthday that Leah had, Jamie had already celebrated. Half of Leah's clothes were "hand-me-downs," which was Mom's fancy way of saying Jamie had worn them first. Now, Leah loved her big sister, but she did not love never being the first one to do anything. She hated it. It wasn't fair.

So Leah decided to make a stand.

One night, when Mom and Dad came to put Leah to bed, Leah said, "Why can't I stay up later? Jamie can."

"Jamie's older than you," Mom explained. "When you're Jamie's age, you can stay up as late as she can, and it'll be fair."

"No!" Leah cried. "It won't be! When I'm Jamie's age, she'll be even older, and she'll get to stay up even later!"

Dad said, "But then you'll get to that age, and stay up even later, and eventually you'll catch up to her!"

Leah put her hands on her hips. “No! Don’t you get it? Right now, I’m four and Jamie is seven. When I’m seven, Jamie will be ten. And when I’m ten, Jamie will already be thirteen! Thirteen! That’s a teenager!” Leah had counted all this out beforehand. She wanted to be prepared.

Mom shook her head and smiled the way she always did when she thought Leah was being silly. “Oh, Leah. It’s true, Jamie will always be older than you. But that can’t change; she was born before you were.”

“Well, you should have had me first!” Leah exclaimed, exasperated. “The way it is now isn’t fair at all!” She turned to her dad. After all, he was a younger brother. He ought to understand what she meant.

But Dad just said, “Would it be fair to Jamie if you had been born first?”

Leah stamped her foot and howled. “Jamie is always first! It’s not fair! She’s hogging all the age! She’s just a... an... age-hog!”

Mom burst out laughing, and then Dad followed suit.

“An age-hog,” Mom gasped between giggles. “I like that.” Leah started to cry from the injustice of it all.

Mom noticed Leah’s tears and tried to stop laughing. She knelt down next to Leah. “Shh, shh, it’s okay, sweetie. We’re not laughing at you.”

“You are too!” Leah sobbed.

“We’re not laughing at you, Leah,” Mom soothed. “We’re laughing with you.”

“But I’m not laughing!” Leah yelled.

She buried her face in Mom’s leg and cried. Dad came and gave Leah a hug, and she was put to bed, but the next morning Leah knew nothing had changed: Jamie was still hogging all the age.

Leah decided it was time to take drastic action. She would find out what Jamie did during that extra half hour.

The next night, Leah went to bed without a fuss. She put on her favorite purple pajamas and brushed her teeth extra well. Then Leah snuggled down into the sheets, and Mom read one of her favorite books, *Goodnight Moon*. Mom kissed Leah on the head and said, “I’m glad that you decided not to make a fuss tonight.”

“Me too,” Leah said, turning onto her side. She kept her eyes shut until she heard Mom click off the light and close the door. Then Leah sprang into action.

She peeled back the covers and hopped silently to the floor. She rushed across the room and opened the door, just a crack. By the light of the hallway, she could see all the way to Jamie’s room. Jamie was playing on the floor with her dolls because she didn’t have to go to sleep yet.



Mom walked into Jamie's room. "Okay, sweetie," Mom said. "It's time to clean up this room."

"Do I have to?" Jamie whined.

"Yes, you do. I let you push it back until after Leah went to bed, but you made a mess of your toys and it's time to clean up. You're a big girl, Jamie. You have to clean up after yourself."

"Fiiiine," Jamie sighed. She put her dolls away and started picking up the rest of her things. Leah was surprised; that didn't look like any fun at all. Maybe after Jamie cleaned she would get to do something better.

But after Jamie cleaned up, all she did was get into her pajamas and go into the bathroom to brush her teeth. How boring! Leah was getting sleepy just watching, but she made sure to keep her eyes open: any minute now Jamie would get to do something fun.

Mom came back into the room after Jamie had finished in the bathroom. "Good job in here!" Mom said. "If only you would keep it clean all the time."

"Mom, would you read to me before bed?" Jamie asked.

"What book?" Mom asked.

"Goodnight Moon," Jamie said.

"I bet you can read that one yourself," Mom said.

"But I don't want to read it myself!" Jamie cried. "I want to hear you read it. You read it to Leah tonight, I heard you. You always read to Leah, just because she's younger, and you never read to me. It's not fair!"

Leah was shocked. She had never thought Jamie would want something Leah had. After all, Jamie got to do all sorts of things Leah didn't. But now it turned out that there was something Leah did that Jamie didn't get to do!

Leah closed the door and tiptoed back to bed in the dark. She thought about how cozy it was when Mom read to her before bed. Did poor Jamie really never have anyone read to her any more? That wasn't fair at all. Jamie might have been hogging all the age, but Leah thought maybe being an age-hog wasn't all that much fun if you had to give up being little that much sooner.

Soon Leah drifted off to sleep, thinking about whether it really was better to be the older sister. The next day, Jamie invited two friends over to have a princess tea party. Leah put on her paper claws and made a tail out of her stuffed snake. But then she thought again, and decided maybe she didn't want to be an interrupting dragon. Instead, she went to see if Mom would read her a book. After all, Mom wouldn't read to her forever, and there would be plenty of chances to be a dragon at tea.

