

# 1. BROTHERS

## TOBY: SHAUN AND ME

My brother is good at  
everything.

Maths – A  
Science – A  
English – A  
PE – A

He always does things  
first  
    better  
        best!

I try  
but I'm not good at  
anything.

Overall – C

*Toby tries hard  
but ...*

I can't do anything  
first  
better  
best.

Mum says we're  
different.  
She says I should just be  
ME.  
But what is  
'Me' good at?

Why do *I* have to be me?



I try so hard –  
think I'm doing well –  
but who notices?

Top of the class in:

Maths

Science

English

Silence.

*Who cares?*

Mum and Dad always worry about  
how Toby will feel.

Teachers focus on  
struggling kids.

Why won't someone notice  
ME?

## **TOBY: OLDEST**

Shaun  
is only  
11 months  
9 days  
4 hours and  
22 minutes  
older than me  
but that's enough  
to make him  
oldest.

'Let Shaun do it.  
He's oldest.  
He's had more time  
to practise than you.'

But always,  
when I get older,  
Shaun is older, too.  
He's still  
oldest,  
more experienced and  
filling shoes I try  
so hard  
to squeeze into.

Responsibility  
and respect are his  
just by being born

first.

How am I going to learn  
if it's always

Shaun

*Shaun*

*SHAUN!?*

He's only  
11 months  
9 days  
4 hours and  
22 minutes  
older.

Oldest.

## SHAUN: SUGAR BABY

Toby has a sweet tooth.  
Always last to finish dinner,  
he eats sparrow's peck  
of goodness,  
but he comes running  
for anything  
sweet.

Mum calls him her *sugar baby*  
and she's right.  
He eats way too much  
sugar  
and he *is*  
the baby.





then pause,  
foraging in my backpack  
for an apple.  
Toby drags his feet,  
trailing along  
behind me –

together

apart

today.

‘Hey, Sugar Baby,’  
I call out, as he draws near,  
head down, shoulders slouched  
within his own sullen world.

‘Did you eat all your lunch today?’  
I fall into pace beside him.

Toby ignores me –  
walks faster,  
his backpack flapping open,  
lunch box  
crammed  
up top.

I grasp the lunch box,  
tug and twist.

Free!

Toby spins around,  
huffing as I  
dangle the weight in my hand.

'I bet you've eaten all  
the sweet stuff,' I say,  
as an empty chocolate wrapper  
and juice box  
spill out.

Squashed down the bottom  
is a wrapped pack of  
soggy sandwiches,  
one bruised banana  
and a container full of  
carrot and celery sticks.

*'You're-gon-na-get-in-trou-ble.'*

## TOBY & SHAUN: SIBLINGS

'Give me my lunch box, Shaun.'

'You shouldn't be wasting food.'

'Leave me alone. You're not my dad.'

'I wouldn't want to be!'

'Stop acting like you are, then.'

'If you did what Mum said, I wouldn't have to.'

'You're not even that much older than me.'

'Act your age, then!'

'You're not perfect

even though you *think* you are!'

'Ha! And *you* think *YOU* are!

What a joke.'

'Leave me alone.'

'Why are you in such a bad mood?'

'I said, *leave me alone!*'

'I'm not even touching you.'

'Just LEAVE ME ALONE!'



top of the class,  
everything right  
in  
his world.

## TOBY: JOGGING

Jogging  
because  
I like the rhythm of my feet  
on the track.

Jogging  
because it  
feels good and strong to  
run past the pain  
that is squeezing at my side.

Jogging  
because even though  
my legs drag,  
my feet fumble,  
my shoulders slump  
and my fingers tingle ...

I  
can  
do  
it.

## SHAUN: READING THE LINES

Mum says I eat books,  
which isn't really  
true although I do read  
a lot.

Reading helps me  
escape  
to another world –  
any world that I want  
to be in.

It helps me to understand  
the real world and  
things that interest me;  
like discus and  
the science behind  
the sport's technique.

Mum says I'd read  
the packaging on  
a can of soup,  
which makes sense  
because how would  
I know what's in it  
otherwise?

*Preservative*  
*Emulsifier*  
*Antioxidant*  
*Humectant*  
*Yeast extract*  
*Maltodextrin*

It's amazing  
how many products  
*may contain*  
*traces of*  
*nuts.*

They say  
books feed knowledge.  
I wonder what we'll read  
for tea tonight.

'What's on the menu, Mum?'



## **TOBY: NOT GOOD ENOUGH!**

Sometimes it feels  
like my body doesn't belong  
to me, like I tell it to do stuff  
and it doesn't. My feet stumble along  
and trip over each other. My hands fumble  
and drop and it's almost like I'm wrapped in  
invisible bubblewrap – stumbly, fumbly, bumbly –  
like a spaceman bumping and blundering along.

I try. I really do.

But my best isn't good enough.

I like LOTE –  
practise Chinese at home  
saying phrases  
as Mum chops vegies  
for tea.

It's like music –  
the words flow together  
making new sounds, new meanings –  
a secret world that Mum hears  
but can't enter.

She grins.  
Keeps chopping.  
I know she thinks  
I'm doing well.

But not my LOTE teacher.

I had to write my assignment  
*ten times* because Lǎoshī said it wasn't neat enough.

'Show some pride in your work!  
Try harder. Write neater.  
This isn't good enough.  
Do it again and  
again and  
again.'

The more I tried the messier it got.

But she *still*  
didn't get it!

I work hard in class –  
don't muck around when others  
throw pencils  
    rubbers  
        spitballs

insults  
around the room.

Couldn't she see that I was trying?

Did she think I *chose*  
to write like that?

Did she think I *wanted*  
to write it out  
over and over  
again?

My hand hurt and the  
harder I tried the more  
those blue lines  
squeezed my letters  
out of \_\_\_\_\_ place,  
                  out of  
                  shApE.

I  
just  
couldn't  
DO IT!

***Overall: D- Write legibly next time.***

Lǎoshī  
didn't even try to read my work,  
just stabbed vicious words in red ink.

She gave me an *E* for *Effort*.

But I tried so hard!

## SHAUN: ALL ABOUT STYLE

When I flex  
and show my muscles  
    (because they're bigger now that I'm  
    almost a teenager – practically a man)  
Dad is *so funny* (*NOT!*)  
and quips,  
    'Rubber-band arms.  
    What muscles?  
    Oh, there.  
    **I can see one!**

Toby and Dad  
roar laughing  
as Mum smiles,  
shaking her head.  
I laugh, too,  
because Dad's such a fool  
it's hard not to.

I say,  
'I don't need  
my (big) muscles  
to throw a discus.

It's all about style  
and technique –

spin,  
    arc,  
        release –

and Coach Lawrie thinks I've got it.'  
(Although she's also the first to say  
she doesn't know much  
about discus.)

Dad scoffs and  
says, 'You won't win  
because you haven't got  
*the muscles*  
or  
*the weight*  
    behind you.'

Toby nods.  
He says, 'You can't be good  
at *everything*, much as  
(he reckons) you like to think you are.'  
    \*Snort\*  
(Just because *he's* not good at anything!)

I'll show them!

Discus is a science,  
almost an art.

I *can* throw a discus.  
I can study technique.  
I can train.

Sports Day is only  
eight weeks away.

I'll show them.

'If I win discus on Sports Day  
*I'll* be the one laughing then!'

Dad laughs harder  
but wariness creeps into  
Toby's eyes  
as his laughter fades  
and his smile  
is forced.

'You always think  
you can do everything,'  
Toby says.

## TOBY: WORST DAY OF THE YEAR

Sports Day.

Again.

Worst day of the year.

Herded around  
compulsory events earning  
a point for my team –  
saving others the humiliation  
of coming  
last.

*There can only be one winner.*

*Someone has to come last.*

But why does that *someone*  
always have to be

ME?



## TOBY: FAILURE

Mum wants to know how I went with my Chinese assignment, but I've wedged it into the middle of a book that I've hidden inside a bigger book and shoved deep inside my messy bottom drawer – jammed shut tight.

Forget it.

I don't ever want *anyone* to see that.

I definitely don't want my MUM to see it. What will I do if *she* thinks I'm dumb?

'You've been working so hard at it,' Mum says and I know she's expecting good news.

Even Blake, who hates LOTE and *wanted* to fail, got a D.

D<sup>-</sup> is the worst mark in the class!

I can't tell Mum.

I feel gluggy-grey and heavy  
like freshly-poured  
cold porridge  
concrete.

I used to *like* LOTE.

Lie.

I used to love LOTE!

*D- Write legibly next time.*

## SHAUN: CHEESE AND CHALK

Everyone says  
you couldn't get  
two brothers more  
different than Toby  
and me.

He worries about everything –  
won't do anything  
without thinking about all  
the possible things that could go  
wrong.

*Cheese please.*

I see all the possible ways of  
doing something right,  
weigh them up  
in a flash, then choose  
the best!

*Chalk the talk.*

It's like life's a joke,  
and Toby's always  
the last to get it.

If he gets it.

Sometimes I think  
that Toby *is* the joke ...

And that's not even funny.  
(Seriously.)

He's my brother  
and everybody knows it ...

But he couldn't be more different  
if he tried.

I don't get it.

## TOBY: LOOK ALIKES

Everyone says  
I look  
just like my mum.

But I'm a boy!

Shouldn't I look  
more like Dad?

But if I looked like Dad,  
I'd look like  
Shaun,  
and I really don't want to look like  
Shaun who looks like  
Justin Bieber  
with his brown hair, brown eyes  
and all the girls at school  
in love with him.

\*Gag\*

Maybe it's a *good* thing  
I look like Mum.