"CLEVER, FUNNY AND MOVING" LISA THOMPSON

ME AND MY BRIAN

HELEN RUTTER

Illustrated by CLAUDIA PETRAZZI

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For Neil

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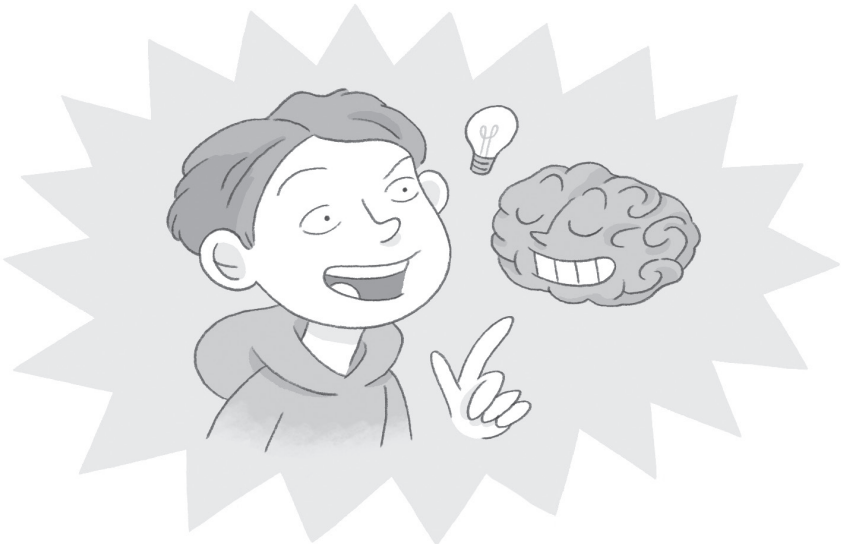
CHAPTER 1

Is it weird that I've given my brain a name? It happened when I was little. I saw the word "brain" written down and totally thought it said "Brian". Mum thought it was hilarious when I started talking about my Brian and so the name stuck.

Brian is like my best mate. He tells me the answers to the tests at school and makes me laugh at the teachers by giving them all funny names. Mr Pritzslaf is "Pritt Stick", Miss Rouse is "Mrs Mouse" and angry Mr Partington is "Mr Fartington", for obvious reasons. Brian came up with them all.

He also gives me brilliant ideas. Brian's latest plan was for a new business. Brian loves



coming up with business ideas. I know he's just a mush of brains, but if he were a person, I think he would wear a sharp suit and shiny shoes. His mobile phone would always be ringing with really important people calling him to talk about deals and money. Brian's latest business idea was a car wash.

I made up flyers for it:

JOBRI CARWASH

£5

NO CAR TOO DIRTY

The name "Jobri" is a mix of my name, which is Josh, and Brian. Brian came up with it. So, he gave me the idea, helped me make the flyers and the customers started coming. But then he went quiet on me. Sometimes he does that. He's more of an ideas guy, I guess. I was left scrubbing cars all afternoon. It was way harder than I thought it would be. I was soon drenched and exhausted, and my arms were killing me.

One grumpy old guy down the road only gave me three quid because he said I hadn't polished his car. But I didn't say I was going to polish it – I only said I would wash it! I made £13 in total, but it didn't really seem worth it for all of the effort. When I got home, I was covered in soap suds and Mum and Charlie were arguing again.

Charlie is three years older than me. He'll turn sixteen next month. He works in a pub washing pots and makes loads of money. But I can't do that until I'm older, so I have to rely on Brian's big ideas instead.

Charlie's room is in the attic and he won't ever let me in it. There are red LED lights around the ceiling, a tank with tropical fish and there is always sweary music coming down the stairs.

When I was younger, Charlie and his mate Matthew used to call me to the bottom of the stairs and then throw stuff at me. They used this sing-song voice and just repeated my name. Eventually, I'd give in and go to the stairs, even though I knew what they'd do. It used to just be pillows and teddies and duvets, but then they started throwing heavy stuff down too. They thought it was hilarious that I kept coming back despite knowing they would chuck stuff at me. The reason I kept going back was because I wanted to go upstairs and hang out with them and the fish in the LED lights.

Sometimes, I sneak up and sit on the stairs and listen to the lyrics of the rude songs. I imagine what he is doing up there – doing his hair or vaping out of the window. When Mum

caught him vaping, they argued about it for days. One time, Charlie actually let me in and there were loads of dirty mugs and empty packets everywhere. It wasn't exactly what I had imagined.

Charlie was cleaning out the fish tank and he asked me to suck on the tube to get the water out of the tank. But he didn't tell me when to stop sucking and I ended up with a mouthful of fish water. Charlie thought it was

the funniest thing in the world. My Brian told me I might be poisoned and die, but I didn't.

Charlie and Mum have been arguing more and more lately. She says he is selfish and ungrateful. He turns around and says things like, "What fifteen year old isn't selfish and ungrateful?" Which I don't think really helps.

It started when Charlie was doing little things like eating a whole box of cereal without asking. Then he was going out without telling Mum where he was going. Charlie says that she's a control freak. Mum says that she has to be a control freak or else everything would fall apart.

Mum does everything. She works in a school all day in the school office and then drives us around to clubs and classes and friends' houses every evening. She feeds us and gets us up every morning, and she looks tired and old because of it. I feel bad and try to help, but

Charlie doesn't. Maybe he hasn't noticed the bags under her eyes.

Mum and Dad split up when I was one, so I don't remember them ever being together. They would look like a weird couple if you ask me. Mum's really short and Dad's really tall, and they have zero things in common. They can't even be in the same room without it feeling weird, so imagine them living in the same house!

Me and Charlie go to Dad's every other weekend and one night in the week. My night is Tuesday and Charlie's is Thursday. Mum and Dad thought it would be good to give us separate nights, but I think it's a bit strange being there without Charlie.

Dad lives with my stepmum, Sophie. When I go there, they hug and kiss and hold hands. I try not to look. Their house is big, they always have Crunchy Nut Cornflakes in the cupboard

and I have my own bedroom, but it doesn't feel like home.

My stepsisters, Ella and Evie, make the house smell like perfume and hairspray. They are always watching shows on telly about real people who don't look real at all. People who have shiny skin and lots of their body bits poking out of their clothes.

Charlie likes it at Dad's house. I think he likes the smells of Ella and Evie's perfumes and I know he likes the Crunchy Nut Cornflakes. Charlie doesn't seem to care that it's not really our house. He sprawls on the big comfy sofa as if it's his own.

Mum had a boyfriend for a while, called James, but he never lived with us and they split up a few months ago. He was OK. He always wore fleeces and had a Jack Russell called Spike, but James never said that much. He always seemed a bit scared of me and Charlie.

When James did speak to us, he used to laugh after everything he said, even when it wasn't at all funny. I think that's why Mum split up with him. I know I couldn't handle spending time with someone who laughed after they asked what the time was. But Mum's been stressed since they split up, and her and Charlie's arguing is worse than ever.