

Brothers

by ReadWorks



Joseph had run away.

Philip could tell his mother was worried by the way she paced up and down the kitchen floor, twisting her hair into knots, while speaking softly into the telephone. "I don't know where he went," she whispered. She shot Philip a sidelong look that seemed to say, "Don't worry," then smiled as if this was just a normal, routine phone call. "No, we didn't get into a fight. There wasn't..." She left the kitchen, glancing quickly at the clock. Philip was going to be late for school.

Philip pushed his cereal around the bowl with his spoon. Joseph hated living at home. "I'm an old soul," he would sing to their mother whenever she asked him to clean the dishes or put away his laundry. "I can't be tethered," he'd sing, until their mother would laugh. "Joseph," she'd say, exasperated.

Joseph was nearly six years older than Philip and was what their mother called "a troublemaker." Philip had a loose understanding of what it meant to be a "troublemaker." It was someone who stayed out past curfew, lied, ran away, and hung around with "a bad crowd."

Philip had met this crowd, and he didn't think they were bad at all. In fact, he liked Joseph's friends. Whenever they saw him, they shook his hand like he was a grown man and not somebody's kid brother.

Last summer, Philip broke his arm playing baseball. That wasn't exactly true, when Philip came to think of it, but it was what he had told Joseph's friends when they saw the cast on his arm. They had given him the nickname "Captain" after that, and Laura, Joseph's girlfriend, always asked him, "Have you been drafted yet?"

Philip hadn't wanted to play baseball at all that summer. He had wanted to join the swim team, but his father said swimming wasn't a sport. Philip knew better than to argue with his dad and so he agreed. He hadn't realized that his baseball coach had stuck him in the outfield because he was a bad player, and that the coach didn't expect anyone to hit a ball that far into the field.

After dinner one night, Philip heard his dad explain it to his mother. "Philip's the worst player on the team. They put him in the outfield so he doesn't mess it up for the rest of the team," he'd said. He didn't know Philip could hear him. Joseph, who was sitting next to Philip, had nudged him, then squeezed his shoulder. "Don't sweat it, kid," he had said. "There's always something better out there."

Philip had broken his arm the day a fly ball-the only one of the game-soared into the sky right above his head. Philip hadn't been paying attention to the game, but suddenly he heard everyone calling his name. He saw the small black dot blot out the sun, and he raised his left hand high into the air and shut his eyes. He felt the ball land heavily in his glove. He was surprised by its weight. His hand was sore.

He ran back toward the mound, proud for the first time all season that he had helped his team. He wasn't looking where he was going and didn't notice the small rock hidden in the green of the outfield until his foot caught against it. Suddenly, he was soaring into the air. And then, just as quickly, he came crashing down, his arm outstretched, snapping as it hit the ground.

He had cried, knowing that his father would be disappointed and that he wouldn't be able to swim again until next summer.

Joseph had taken him out for ice cream.

"You know, there's a lot more to life than baseball," Joseph had said. "Take me. I wasn't meant for some crummy two-star town."

Philip had smiled, agreeing. He wasn't sure what Joseph meant by "two-star," but he knew that Joseph wanted life to move fast and hard.

"Someday, I'm gonna wipe the stain of this town from my boots, and really make it. You know, see the world, get famous, make money. And I'm going to do it my way."

Philip sat quietly. "You'll say goodbye before you go, right?" he asked.

Joseph laughed. "You're really something, you know that?"

When Philip thought about it, he realized that Joseph had never really answered him. They'd left the ice cream store and walked home, and Joseph had never mentioned leaving again.

By now, Philip's cereal had gone soft. It was inedible. His mother was organizing the cabinets. "You know, your brother's really done it this time," she said. She ran her fingers through her hair, sighing deeply.

"I'm an old soul," Philip sang. "I can't be tethered."

His mother smiled. She looked at the clock.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What has caused Philip's mother to worry at the beginning of the text?

- A. Joseph has fought with his mother.
- B. Philip has broken his arm.
- C. Joseph has run away.
- D. Joseph has stayed out past curfew.

2. What main problem does Joseph face in this story?

- A. Joseph breaks his arm.
- B. Joseph hates living at home.
- C. Joseph disappoints his father.
- D. Joseph does not want to play baseball.

3. Joseph thinks his family's town is holding him back from achieving his dreams and goals. What evidence from the text best supports this conclusion?

- A. "Philip had smiled, agreeing. He wasn't sure what Joseph meant by 'two-star' but he knew that Joseph wanted life to move fast and hard."
- B. "Someday, I'm gonna wipe the stain of this town from my boots, and really make it. You know, see the world, get famous, make money."
- C. "Joseph...had nudged him, then squeezed his shoulder. 'Don't sweat it, kid,' he had said. 'There's always something better out there.'"
- D. "'I'm an old soul,' he would sing to their mother whenever she asked him to clean the dishes or put away his laundry. 'I can't be tethered.'"

4. Based on the information in the text, how does Philip feel about his brother Joseph?

- A. Philip is annoyed by Joseph's behavior.
- B. Philip is disappointed in Joseph.
- C. Philip thinks that Joseph is a troublemaker.
- D. Philip cares for Joseph and looks up to him.

5. What is the main idea of the text?

- A. Philip wants to join the swim team but is forced to play baseball.
- B. Philip's "troublemaker" brother Joseph has run away.
- C. Philip's father is disappointed that he is not good at baseball.
- D. Philip catches a fly ball during a baseball game.

6. The author of the text first writes that Joseph has run away. Then the author goes back in time to the previous summer and writes about the day Philip broke his arm, and the conversation the two brothers had. Then the author returns to the day Joseph has run away from home.

Why might the author have included the part of the story about the day Philip broke his arm and the conversation the two brothers had?

- A. to show the reader that Philip does not want to disappoint his brother Joseph
- B. to make the plot more confusing by jumping between time periods
- C. to explain why Joseph's mother thought he was a troublemaker
- D. to show the reader how Philip may feel about Joseph running away

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Philip asks his brother if he will say goodbye before he leaves town; _____, Joseph simply laughs and does not answer the question.

- A. however
- B. therefore
- C. for instance
- D. especially

8. When Joseph tells Philip he plans to leave town someday, what does Philip ask?

9. How does Joseph help his brother Philip? Give at least one example from the text to support your answer.

10. Is Joseph a good older brother to Philip? Support your argument with evidence from the text.
