

BRUCE BROOKS



THE MOVES MAKE THE MAN

There are no moves you truly make alone. There are no moves you truly make alone. There are no moves you truly make alone.

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Now, Bix Rivers has disappeared, and who do you think is going to tell his story but me? Maybe his stepfather? Man, that dude does not know Bix deep and now he never will, will he? Only thing he could say is he's probably secretly happy Bix ran away and got out of his life, but he won't tell you even that on account of he's busy getting sympathy dumped on him all over town as the poor deserted guardian.

How about Bix's momma? Can she tell you? I reckon not—she is crazy in the hospital. And you can believe, they don't let crazies have anything sharp like a pencil, else she poke out her eye or worse. So she won't be writing any stories for a long time. But me—I have plenty of pencils, number threes all sharp and dark green enamel on the outside, and I have four black and white marble composition books. Plus I can tell you some things, like Bix was thirteen last birthday (same as me), Bix was a shortstop (supreme), Bix gets red spots the size of a quarter on his cheekbones when angry and a splotch looks like a cardinal smack in the middle of his forehead when he is ashamed. I can tell a lot more besides, including why Bix ran away. You just listen

to me and you'll be getting the story, all you want. You don't pay any mind to all this creepy jive that is going around town and school now about how Bix was bad and crazy like his momma and deserted her when she was sick and his stepfather too. Didn't I hear that old snooty preacher at the white First Baptist saying so last Sunday, moaning about children full of sin, with everybody in the church mooning with sympathy and staring all mushy over at the poor stepfather sitting in the third row?

I went by there to talk to that man after church, thinking to catch him all softened up and ask had he got any word of Bix. But when I heard that sin-child chatter, I gave it over. Fact I almost jumped right into their high service mumbo and told them what they were about—that would have been a sight, this skinny kid black as a clarinet wailing out a licorice tune right there on the light blue carpet aisle cutting off that organ with the fake pipes just as it wheezed into one of their wavery old hymns. But it would not have done any bit of good. When people are set to hear bad things, that is what they will hear. Listen, that is just about all white people go to church for, to have some soft old duck moan at them about all the sins ever been committed and all going to keep right on being committed so we might just as well give up on getting good, and settle for getting a nasty thrill watching the sins go on. You don't hear that kind of giving up at the colored churches around here, I can tell you. People mostly go there to sing, which is different from moaning any day.

When I came home from that church I was angry at the lies being told. Not just that they told that Bix was bad and a runaway—because there was some bad growing in Bix, and he did run away and that is that. But those people did not understand worth a penny.

That is when and why I decided to write this story of Bix. Of Bix and me, mostly, I guess it has to be. I may not understand it all yet myself, but I got all summer ahead of me, and a room to myself, cool up under the eaves, because my brother Henri is off to camp. My momma wanted to send me first, but I told her I wouldn't go on account of I knew I could use the summer better writing this out. So it's Henri gets to make the wallets and lanyards and sing the national anthem while the flag is raised every morning and swim in a lake warm as blood.

It's me gets to tell the truth.

FIRST TIME I SAW BIX WAS AT A BASEBALL GAME.

He was a shortstop, supreme. I didn't want to start liking this flashy cracker with a momma in a high-style black dress. But Bix got me, baby. Next thing I knew, there I was, Jerome Foxworthy, doing hoops privately in the woods and getting my moves down, when Bix showed up. I taught him all I knew—even though he wanted to play everything straight, not fake it. Because he had one game coming up where he'd need all the moves to put his life together again . . .

—The Jayfox

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