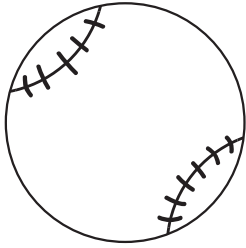


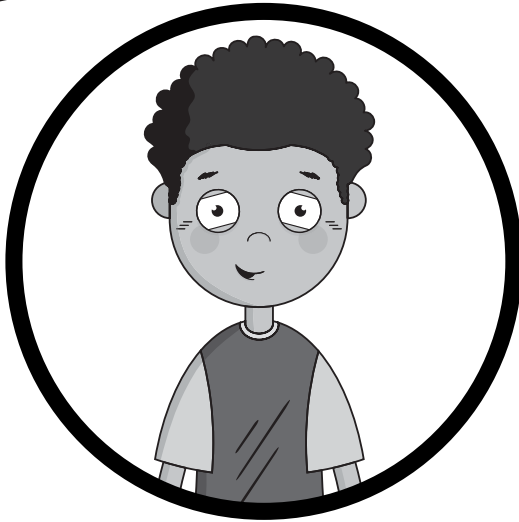
An illustration of a person from the waist down, wearing a purple dress and teal pants. They are holding a large, yellow, rectangular sign with rounded corners and four brown corner protectors. The sign has the text 'The Forever Boy' written in a black, cursive script. The background is a light teal wall and a floor with a blue and white diamond pattern.

The Forever Boy

ANNE SCHRAFF



MEET THE



Bruno

Age: 10

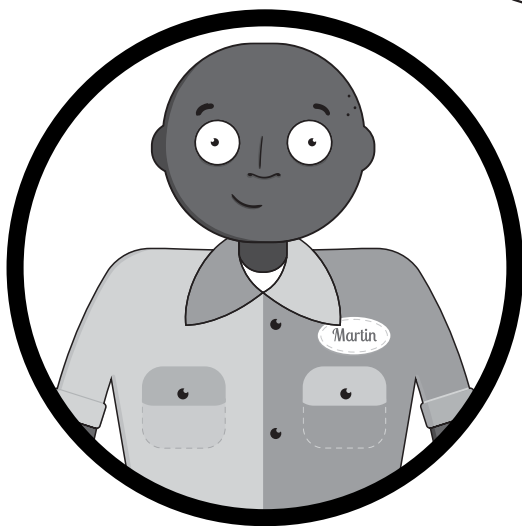
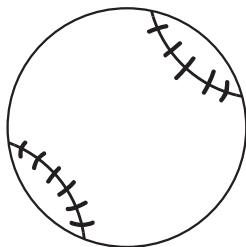
Career Goal: to pitch for the New York Yankees

Favorite Cookie: chewy chocolate chip with
Reese's Pieces

Allergic To: pineapple

Best Quality: is never bitter

CHARACTERS



Martin

Age: 38

Big Secret: likes Eve's pies better than Mama's

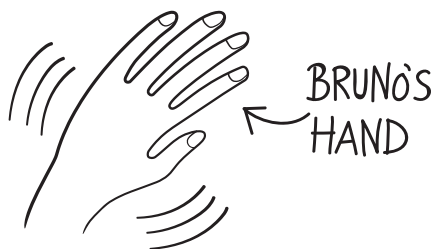
Hidden Talent: speaks fluent French

Favorite Movie: *Glory*

Best Quality: puts his family first

FOSTER HOME

Bruno Hayes stood. He was in the living room. Shaking. He had the chills. But it wasn't cold. His foster parents were in the kitchen. They were fighting about something. Bruno was afraid the fight was about him.



Bruno was 10 years old. This was his fifth foster home. He'd been here for almost six months. It seemed to be going well. But he

was always nervous. It had happened like this before. He'd feel okay in a foster home. But then his foster parents got tired of him. Or something else happened. Then he had to leave.

What were the Browns talking about? Sending him away?

Bruno really wanted to stay. This was the best foster home. He had never known one better. Martin and Eve Brown were nice people. They treated him well.



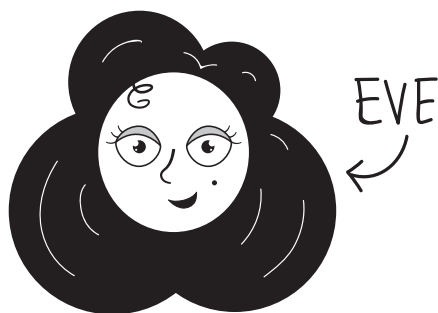
Bruno had wished for a family. He'd wanted someone to adopt him. But nobody had. So far. He'd dreamed about a forever

family. Now his dream of being adopted was gone. He just wanted to stay here.

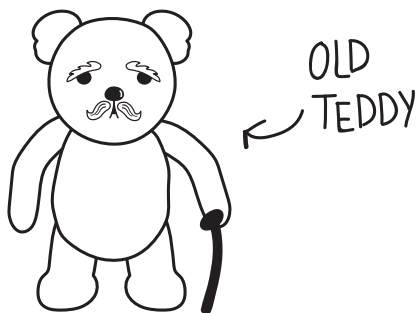
Bruno tried to listen. What were they were saying? He prayed. He didn't want to hear his name. He hoped he hadn't done something wrong. Something to make them mad.

Bruno got closer to the kitchen. He listened.

"Martin Brown," Eve Brown said. "You're always moaning about something." Eve was a curvy woman. She was super pretty. "Get your hands off my apple pie! It's not even dinner yet."



“I was just tasting it, Eve. Don’t get mad. You know something? Your pies aren’t sweet enough. Now my mama? She knows how to make an apple pie. It’s as sweet as honey.” Martin was a big man. He looked a little scary. Especially when Bruno first came here. But he was cuddly. As soft as an old teddy bear.



“I am so sick of hearing about your mama. Go live with her,” Eve said. “Don’t mess up my life.” She sounded mad. But she wasn’t. It was just her way. Bruno was used to it. He liked Eve a lot.

Bruno felt better. Phew! They weren't fighting about him. They weren't talking about sending him away. The Browns fought a lot. But it never got mean. In one foster home it was bad. The people hit each other. Then they hit him. And another foster boy. He was scared the whole time he was there. Bruno was glad to leave that place.

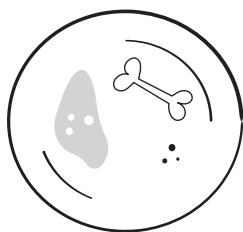
"I'll make some sugar syrup. That will sweeten the pie, Martin," Eve said. She laughed a little. Bruno smiled too.

It was okay. For now.



2

CATCH



They sat down to eat. Bruno cleaned his plate. He always did. Everything was so good. A few times he looked at the Browns. He was afraid. He'd never felt so good. Living here was the best!

The Browns felt like his real parents. Almost. But they weren't. They were not his forever family. It could end tomorrow. Or the day after.

Eve Brown was 35 years old. She worked a few hours each day. She helped at a home for the elderly. The job paid for extras around the house. She seemed to like everybody. Adults. Kids. It didn't matter.

Martin Brown was 38. He was a gardener. He worked hard. Planting big trees. Making stone paths. One time he sat beside Bruno. "You know who I was named after? Martin Luther King Jr. Ever heard of him?" he asked.

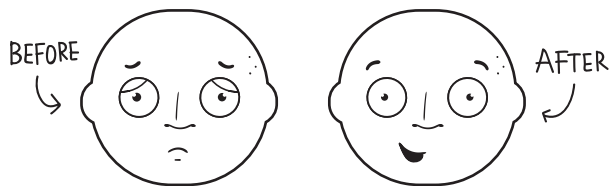


"Yes, sir," Bruno said. "He was a brave man. Learned about him in school. He worked for civil rights. He was a hero."

“Yes. He was that,” Martin said. “He was famous all over the world.” Martin looked a little sad then. “My mom and dad? They thought the name would rub off. Maybe I’d be great too. Nope. It did not happen. I pull weeds. Make sidewalks. Plant grass. Trees. Nothing great about that.”

Bruno didn’t know what to say. So he said, “I think you’re a cool guy.”

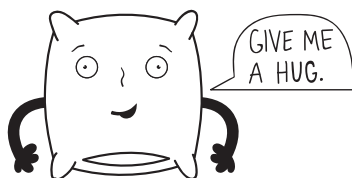
Martin smiled. He threw his arm over Bruno’s shoulder. “Well, I think you’re a cool guy too.” He didn’t look sad anymore.



Why didn’t the Browns have kids? Sometimes Bruno wondered. But he never asked.

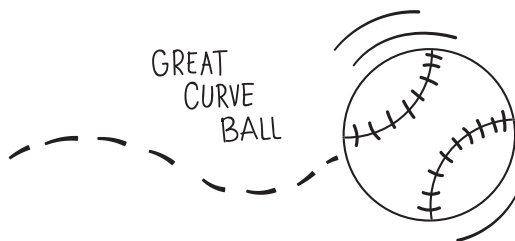
One day Eve said, “I guess we’re nobody special. I’m just a lady who cleans. And Martin? Well, he never finished high school. The man can’t do math. Kids coming to us would have a hard time. Maybe that’s why none came.”

Bruno felt like he was their kid. Sometimes. But he knew he was just a foster boy. When he got home from school? Eve would hug him. Then she’d say, “How’s my big boy?” Those hugs felt great. Like being hugged by a soft pillow.



Martin played catch with Bruno. It happened almost every night. They would play till it got dark. Bruno had always loved

baseball. Now Martin was teaching him a lot. He was getting better every day. He was turning into a good pitcher.



Martin would grin. His white teeth would glow against his dark skin. “Man! Oh man! Boy, you’re getting to be a real pitcher. You got the arm, Bruno. Maybe you gonna be another Rollie Fingers. Or Catfish Hunter. You ever hear of them?”

“Yes, sir,” Bruno said. “I got a baseball book one time. I read it in the library.”

Life was good. Hanging out with Martin. Playing catch. Like a dream come true. Maybe too good to last.

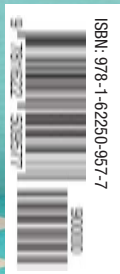
The Forever Boy

I say we are a family,
Eve and me. Then
along comes Bruno.
Man, life is sweet.




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