

Bud, Not Buddy

Christopher Paul Curtis

Random House Children's Books

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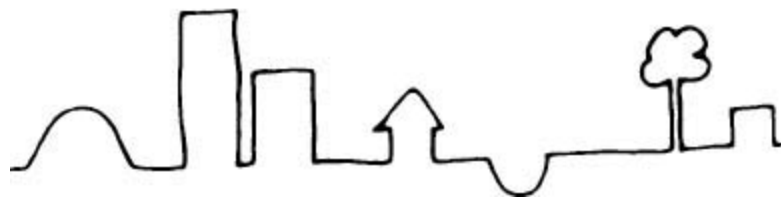
Bud is on a journey. He has hit the road with one idea in mind - he wants to discover his father. He's not got a lot to go on - just a flyer for a jazz band and his very own Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar Out of Yourself. Despite encounters with a car-driving vampire, a monster-infested woodshed and even a real live girl, Bud presses on towards a surprising discovery ...

Readers will be instantly engaged by Bud's heartwarming, funny and fast-moving story in this award-winning novel set in 1930s America.

BUD

NOT BUDDY

Christopher Paul Curtis



I dedicate this book to the following people:

*Leslie and Herman Curtis, Jr.,
Sarah and Earl Lewis,
Hazel and Herman E. Curtis, Sr.,
Joan and George Taylor, Nina and Sterling Sleet,
Gloria and Frederick 'Bud' Curtis,
Virginia and F. D. Johnson, Paul Lewis,
Donna and Eugene Miller,
Johnnie and Don Ricks,
Rosemary and Willie Swan,
Carol and Lawrence Anderson,
Laverne and James Cross Sr.,
Carolyn and Dan Evans,
Willie Frances and Robert James,
Dorothy and Theodore Johnson,
Tommie and Robert Epps Sr.,
Mr and Mrs Small of Liberty Street, James Wesley Sr.,
Harrison Edward Patrick,
James Cross Jr.,
LaRon Williams, Douglas Tennant,
Margaret Davidson, Roland Alums, John Nash,
Suzanne Henry Jakeway
and Alvin Stockard -
all of whom led and lead by example, all of whom have
been models of compassion, strength and love,
all of whom I'll remember for ever.*

ALSO AVAILABLE IN CORGI PAPERBACK

(UN)ARRANGED MARRIAGE by Bali Rai

THE SKIN I'M IN by Sharon G Flake

ALL THE KING'S HORSES by Laura C Stevenson

NOUGHTS AND CROSSES by Malorie Blackman

CHAPTER ONE

HERE WE GO again. We were all standing in line waiting for breakfast when one of the caseworkers came in and *tap-tap-tapped* down the line. Uh-oh, this meant bad news, either they'd found a foster home for somebody or somebody was about to get paddled. All the kids watched the woman as she moved along the line, her high-heeled shoes sounding like little firecrackers going off on the wooden floor.

Shoot! She stopped at me and said, 'Are you Buddy Caldwell?'

I said, 'It's Bud, not Buddy, ma'am.'

She put her hand on my shoulder and took me out of line. Then she pulled Jerry, one of the littler boys, over. 'Aren't you Jerry Clark?' He nodded.

'Boys, good news! Now that the school year has ended, you both have been accepted in new temporary care homes starting this afternoon!'

Jerry asked the same thing I was thinking. 'Together?'

She said, 'Why, no. Jerry, you'll be in a family with three little girls ...'

Jerry looked like he'd just found out they were going to dip him in a pot of boiling milk.

'... and Bud ...' She looked at some papers she was holding. 'Oh, yes, the Amoses, you'll be with Mr and Mrs

Amos and their son, who's twelve years old, that makes him just two years older than you, doesn't it, Bud?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

She said, 'I'm sure you'll both be very happy.'

Me and Jerry looked at each other.

The woman said, 'Now, now, boys, no need to look so glum. I know you don't understand what it means, but there's a depression going on all over this country. People can't find jobs and these are very, very difficult times for everybody. We've been lucky enough to find two wonderful families who've opened their doors for you. I think it's best that we show our new foster families that we're very ...'

She dragged out the word *very*, waiting for us to finish her sentence for her.

Jerry said, 'Cheerful, helpful and grateful.' I moved my lips and mumbled.

She smiled and said, 'Unfortunately, you won't have time for breakfast. I'll have a couple of pieces of fruit put in a bag. In the meantime go to the sleep room and strip your beds and gather all of your things.'

Here we go again. I felt like I was walking in my sleep as I followed Jerry back to the room where all the boys' beds were jim-jammed together. This was the third foster home I was going to and I'm used to packing up and leaving, but it still surprises me that there are always a few seconds, right after they tell you you've got to go, when my nose gets all runny and my throat gets all choky and my eyes get all sting-y. But the tears coming out doesn't happen to me any more. I don't know when it first happened, but it seems like my eyes don't cry no more.

Jerry sat on his bed and I could tell that he was losing the fight not to cry. Tears were popping out of his eyes and slipping down his cheeks.

I sat down next to him and said, 'I know being in a house with three girls sounds terrible, Jerry, but it's a lot better than being with a boy who's a couple of years older than

you. I'm the one who's going to have problems. A older boy is going to want to fight, but those little girls are going to treat you real good. They're going to treat you like some kind of special pet or something.'

Jerry said, 'You really think so?'

I said, 'I'd trade you in a minute. The worst thing that's going to happen to you is that they're going to make you play house a lot. They'll probably make you be the baby and will hug you and do this kind of junk to you.' I tickled Jerry under his chin and said, 'Ga-ga goo-goo, baby-waby.'

Jerry couldn't help but smile. I said, 'You're going to be great.'

Jerry looked like he wasn't so scared any more so I went over to my bed and started getting ready.

Even though it was me who was in a lot of trouble I couldn't help but feel sorry for Jerry. Not only because he was going to have to live around three girls, but also because being six is a real rough age to be at. Most folks think you start to be a real adult when you're fifteen or sixteen years old, but that's not true, it really starts when you're around six.

It's at six that grown folks don't think you're a cute little kid any more, they talk to you and expect that you understand everything they mean. And you'd best understand too, if you aren't looking for some real trouble, 'cause it's around six that grown folks stop giving you little swats and taps and jump clean up to giving you slugs that'll knock you right down and have you seeing stars in the middle of the day. The first foster home I was in taught me that real quick.

Six is a bad time too 'cause that's when some real scary things start to happen to your body, it's around then that your teeth start coming a-loose in your mouth.

You wake up one morning and it seems like your tongue is the first one to notice that something strange is going on, 'cause as soon as you get up, there it is, pushing and

rubbing up against one of your front teeth and I'll be doggoned if that tooth isn't the littlest bit wiggly.

At first you think it's kind of funny, but the tooth keeps getting looser and looser and one day, in the middle of pushing the tooth back and forth and squinching your eyes shut, you pull it clean out. It's the scariest thing you can think of 'cause you lose control of your tongue at the same time and no matter how hard you try to stop it, it won't leave the new hole in your mouth alone, it keeps digging around in the spot where that tooth used to be.

You tell some adult what's happening but all they do is say it's normal. You can't be too sure, though, 'cause it shakes you up a whole lot more than grown folks think it does when perfectly good parts of your body commence to loosening up and falling off of you.

Unless you're as stupid as a lamppost you've got to wonder what's coming off next, your arm? Your neck? Every morning when you wake up it seems a lot of your parts aren't stuck on as good as they used to be.

Six is real tough. That's how old I was when I came to live here in the Home. That's how old I was when Momma died.

I folded the blanket and sheet and set them back on the mattress. Then I reached under the bed to get my suitcase. Most of the kids in the Home keep their things in a paper or cloth sack, but not me. I have my own suitcase.

I set it on the mattress and untied the twine that held it together. I did what I do every night before I go to sleep, I checked to make sure everything was there. The way there're more and more kids coming into the Home every day, I had to make sure no one had run off with any of my things.

First I pulled my blanket out and saw that everything was where it was supposed to be. At the bottom of my suitcase were the flyers. I took the blue flyer out and looked at it again.

The paper was starting to wear out from me looking at it so much but I liked checking to see if there was anything I hadn't noticed before. It was like something was telling me there was a message for me on this flyer but I didn't have the decoder ring to read what it was.

Across the top of the flyer writ in big black letters were the words LIMITED ENGAGEMENT, then in little letters it said, 'Direct from an SRO engagement in New York City.' Underneath that in big letters again it said, 'HERMAN E. CALLOWAY AND THE DUSKY DEVASTATORS OF THE DEPRESSION!!!!!!'

Those six exclamation points made it seem like this was the most important news anyone could think of, seems like you'd have to be really great to deserve all of those exclamation points all stacked up in a row like that.

Next the paper said, 'Masters of the New Jazz', then in the middle of the flyer was a blurry picture of the man I have a real good suspicion about. I've never met him, but I have a pretty good feeling that this guy must be my father.

In the picture he's standing next to a giant fiddle that's taller than him. It looks like it's real heavy 'cause he's leaning up against it trying to hold it up. He looks like he's been doing this for a long time and he must be tired 'cause he has a droopy, dreamy look on his face. There are two men beside him, one playing drums and the other one blowing a horn.

It wasn't hard to see what the guy who must be my father was like just by looking at his picture. You could tell he was a real quiet, real friendly and smart man, he had one of those kind of faces. Underneath the picture someone had writ with a black fountain pen, 'One Night Only in Flint, Michigan, at the Luxurious Fifty Grand on Saturday June 16, 1932. 9 until?'

I remember Momma bringing this flyer with her when she came from working one day, I remember because she got very upset when she put it on the supper table and kept looking at it and picking it up and putting it back and

moving it around. I was only six then and couldn't understand why this one got her so upset, she kept four others that were a lot like it in her dressing table, but this one really got her jumpy. The only difference I could see between the blue one and the others was that the others didn't say anything about Flint on them.

I remember this blue one too 'cause it wasn't too long after she brought it home that I knocked on Momma's bedroom door, then found her.

I put the blue flyer back in the suitcase with the four older ones and put everything back in its place.

I went over to the big chest of drawers and took my other set of clothes out and put them in the suitcase too. I tied the twine back around my bag, then went and sat on Jerry's bed with him. Jerry must've been thinking just as hard as I was 'cause neither one of us said nothing, we just sat close enough so that our shoulders were touching.

Here we go again.

CHAPTER TWO

THERE COMES A time when you're losing a fight that it just doesn't make sense to keep on fighting. It's not that you're being a quitter, it's just that you've got the sense to know when enough is enough.

I was having this thought because Todd Amos was hitting me so hard and fast that I knew that the blood squirting out of my nose was only the beginning of a whole long list of bad things that were about to happen to me.

Todd's next punch crashed into the side of my ear and I fell on the floor and pulled my knees up to my chest and crossed my arms in front of my head like a turtle in a shell. I started scooching toward the bed hoping I could get under it.

Todd started kicking me but his slippers couldn't hurt me near as much as his fists had. The bedroom door opened and his mother, Mrs Amos, came in. It seemed like she was having a hard time figuring out what was going on because Todd's right leg got tired from kicking me and he switched over to his left one while she watched.

Finally Mrs Amos said kind of soft, 'Toddy?'

Todd looked up, fell on his knees and put his hands on his throat. He started huffing and puffing with his eyes bucking out of his head and his chest going up and down so hard that it looked like some kind of big animal was inside

of him trying to bust out. This was my chance to get under the bed and pull the covers down so they couldn't see me.

Mrs Amos ran over to her son and fell on her knees. She put her arms around his shoulders.

'Toddy? Toddy boy, are you all right?' She looked over to where I was peeking from under the bed. 'You little cur, what have you done to Toddy?'

Todd coughed out, 'Oh, Mother ...' He took in two jumbo breaths. 'I was only trying to help ...' - he was sounding like a horse that had been run too hard in the winter - 'and ... and look what it's gotten me.'

Todd pointed at his jaw and Mrs Amos and me could both see a perfect print in the shape of my hand welted up on Todd's blubbery cheek.

With one quick snatch she had me from under the bed and out on the floor laying down next to Todd.

'How dare you! This is how you choose to repay me? Not only have you struck him, you have provoked his asthma!'

Todd said, 'I just tried to waken him to make sure he'd gone to the lavatory, Mother. I was just trying to help.' He aimed his finger dead at me and said, 'And look at him, Mother, this one's got "bed wetter" written all over him.'

I'm not bragging when I say that I'm one of the best liars in the world but I got to tell you, Todd was pretty doggone good. It seems like he knew some of the same things I know, the things I think of all the time and try to remember so I don't make the same mistake more than seven or eight times. Shucks, I've got so many of them rememorized that I had to give them numbers, and it seemed like Todd knew Number 3 of Bud Caldwell's Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar Out of Yourself.

RULES AND THINGS NUMBER 3

**If You Got to Tell a Lie, Make Sure
It's Simple and Easy to Remember.**

Todd had done that. But this wasn't really a good test because Mrs Amos had her ears set to believe anything Todd said. In her eyes Todd's mouth was a prayer book.

But I can't blame Todd for lying like that, having someone who likes you so much that they think everything you say is the truth has got to be a liar's paradise, that might feel so good it could make you want to quit lying. But maybe not, 'cause Todd hadn't quit lying since the second I came to his house.

What had really happened was that I woke up from a good sleep because it felt like a steam locomotive had jumped the tracks and chug-chugged its way straight into my nose.

When I'd jerked up in bed and opened my eyes Todd was standing next to me with a yellow pencil in his hand. He was looking at it like it was a thermometer and said, 'Wow! You got all the way up to *R!*'

He turned the pencil toward me, crunched up against the headboard. I saw TICONDEROGA printed on the yellow wood.

The whole room smelled like the rubber from the eraser and I was winking and blinking my left eye because it felt like something had poked the back of my eyeball.

Todd laughed. 'I've never gotten it in as deep as the *N* on any of you other little street urchins. I just might enjoy your stay here. Who knows what other things you could be number one in, Buddy?'

I'd already told him twice that my name was Bud, not Buddy.

I didn't care that Todd Amos was twelve years old, I didn't care that he was twice as big as me, and I didn't care that his mother was being paid to take care of me. I wasn't about to let anybody call me Buddy and stick a pencil up my nose all the way to the *R*.

I swung as hard as I could at Todd's big balloon head.

Somewhere between the time I threw my punch and the time it landed my fist came open and when my hand landed it made a pop like a .22 rifle going off. Todd fell on the floor like he'd been coldcocked.

He sputtered and muttered and felt the spot where I'd slapped him. Then a big smile came on his face and he stood up and started walking real slow toward where I was on the bed. He untied his robe and dropped it on the floor like he was getting ready to do some hard work.

I jumped to the floor and got my fists up. Todd might've been a lot bigger than me but he'd better be ready, this wasn't going to be a bird's nest sitting on the ground for him. He could kiss my wrist if he thought I was going to let him whip me up without a good fight.

Being this brave was kind of stupid. Even though Todd was a puffy, rich old mamma's boy who wore a robe and slippers, he could hit like a mule and it wasn't too long before I'd decided enough was enough.

But the story that Mrs Amos was hearing from her lying son was only that Todd had tried to wake me up so I could go to the bathroom.

Mrs Amos hated bed wetters more than anything in the world and my bed had a sticky, hot, smelly, rubber baby sheet on it. She'd said it wasn't anything personal and after I had proved myself for two or three months I could get a proper cloth sheet, but until then she had to protect her mattress.

She pulled Todd to his feet and led him to the door. She looked over at me. 'You are a beastly little brute and I will not tolerate even one night with you under my roof. Who knows what you would be capable of while we slept?'

The door shut behind them and I heard a key jiggle in the lock.

I plugged the right side of my nose and tried real hard to blow the smell of rubber out of the left side.

The key jiggled in the lock again. This time when the door opened Mr Amos was standing with Mrs Amos. He was carrying my suitcase. Uh-oh, they'd looked inside. I could tell because the twine that held it together was tied in a kind of knot that I didn't know.

This was wrong. They'd promised they'd keep it safe and not look in it. They'd laughed at me when I made them promise, but they did promise.

'Boy,' Mrs Amos said, 'I am not the least bit surprised at your show of ingratitude. Lord knows I have been stung by my own people before. But take a good look at me because I am one person who is totally fed up with you and your ilk. I do not have time to put up with the foolishness of those members of our race who do not want to be uplifted. In the morning I'll be getting in touch with the Home and, much as a bad penny, you shall be returning to them. I am a woman of my word, though, and you shall not spend one night in my house.'

She looked at her husband. 'Mr Amos will show you to the shed tonight and you can come back in tomorrow for breakfast before you go. I do hope your conscience plagues you because you have ruined things for many others. I do not know if I shall ever be able to help another child in need. I do know I shall not allow vermin to attack my poor baby in his own house.'

She talked like that and she wasn't even a preacher or a teacher. Shucks, she talked strange like this and she wasn't even a librarian.

I only halfway listened to what Mrs Amos was saying, I was too busy keeping my eye on my suitcase wondering if they'd stolen anything from it. And thinking about getting even.

When I thought she was done talking I reached my hand out for my suitcase but she told Mr Amos, 'Oh, no, we shall hold onto his beloved valuables.' She laughed. 'This shall be our assurance that nothing comes up missing from the

house and that this little animal is still here in the morning. He is far too attached to those treasures to go anywhere without them.'

Mrs Amos was one of those grown-ups who could always think of one more thing to say. 'And that is not all. Before you retire to the shed you shall go to Todd and apologize or I shall be forced to give you the strapping of your life.'

I'd been so worried about my suitcase that I didn't even notice the thick black razor strap hanging out of Mrs Amos's hand.

She didn't have to worry, I'd apologize. One beating from these Amoses was enough for me.

She grabbed my arm. Mr Amos walked out of the room with my suitcase, and Mrs Amos pulled me down the hall to Todd's room. We stood outside the door listening to Todd groan. When Mr Amos came back, my suitcase was gone. He'd been so quick that I knew my bag couldn't be too far away.

She tapped on Todd's door and said, 'Toddy, may we come in?'

Todd's groans got a lot louder. Finally he said, 'Yes, Mother' - choke ... cough - 'come in.'

We opened the door and as soon as he saw me Todd got a real terrified look on his face. He scooped up to the headboard and wrapped his arms around his head.

Mrs Amos gave me a shake and said, 'Well?'

I put my head down and started shooting apologies out like John Dillinger shoots out bullets. I aimed at Todd first. 'I know it was wrong of me to hit you. I know you were only trying to help and I'm very sorry for what I did.'

I looked at Mr Amos. 'And sir, I'm sorry that I got you out of your sleep.'

He rolled his eyes like that was enough for him.

Mrs Amos was going to be the hardest because just like her ears were set to believe everything that came out of Todd's lips they were set not to believe anything I said. And