

Brainstorm

Buckley School Books #2

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Cover Illustrations by Rebecca Caffall

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SUMMARY: They don't call him Brian the Brain for nothing: Brian Ferguson is very smart. Sometimes Brian is too smart for his own good and his brainstorm backfire. After Brian makes up a mystery about a gang of criminals stealing art from the Buckley Museum, his classmates discover the plot is real! Can the kids stop the robbers?

Audience: Ages 9-12.

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For my dad, the inspiration for Brian.

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Very special thanks to you, the reader.

Best wishes for happy adventuring!

Corey Green

Chapter One

Worst Nickname EVER!

Brian was nervous about presenting his lie detector to the class. He wasn't worried about whether it would work. Everything Brian built worked perfectly. He wasn't called Brian the Brain for nothing.

Brian wasn't just smart. He had brainstorms: clever ideas for solving problems. Usually the problems involved the best way to solve a math puzzle, or how to apply science in his inventions.

Now, Brian had a new kind of problem: getting the other kids to realize that he was a regular kid, maybe even a cool kid.

Most of the kids in his class thought that all Brian cared about was school. They emailed him homework questions every night, but they never wrote just to say hello.

Brian's brainstorm was that his lie detector presentation could change everything. That was the reason he was so nervous about presenting it to the class.

Brian's lie detector was basically a heart rate monitor to track the subject's pulse and a buzzer that would go off if the subject's heart beat very quickly. A rapid pulse rate could mean the subject was nervous—perhaps because he was lying.

In the old days, when it didn't really bother Brian that kids called him Brian the Brain, the machine itself would have been enough. After Brian had the brainstorm to make it cool, he added (fake) extra parts so it would look awesome.

Brian installed a dial that went from Low to JOLT! (All it did was turn the machine on.) Two pens drew an impressive graph on a long strip of paper. (All they did was squiggle.) Brian asked the coolest kid in class, Tyler, to be his first subject. Tyler didn't really like Brian, but so what? Just having Tyler in the presentation could make Brian look cool.

Brian buckled the heart rate monitor strap around Tyler's arm and turned on the lie detector. The audience at Mr. Hoker's sixth grade Parents Day watched in silence as the pens squiggled along.

Brian pretended to examine the graphs. "Tell the truth or you'll be shocked," he told Tyler. Brian had told Tyler he would use the lowest shock setting, but in reality the machine would just buzz loudly.

Brian began his questioning. “Did you—”

“Aawk! Beep! Beep!”

The audience was startled, but the sixth graders knew it was just Polly, the class parrot. She loved to imitate Hoker’s microwave.

“Stop it, Polly,” Connor said. During regular class, he sat next to the parrot and had put himself in charge of teaching her how to speak. “Behave or you’ll have to take a nap.”

Polly made soft clucking sounds. “Night-night, Polly. Night-night, Polly.” She soothed herself into silence.

The sixth graders giggled until Hoker took control of the class and said, “Please continue your presentation, Brian.”

“Tyler, did you email me about our math homework?”

“Who didn’t?” Tyler retorted. “You’re the only one who understands improper fractions.”

“He means thank you,” Stefi called out from the audience.

There was silence as the sixth-graders looked to Hoker. Everyone knew how strict he was about talking out of turn.

In the silence, everyone could clearly hear a red-haired lady sitting beside Hoker asking, “Are all sixth-graders this immature?”

By now Brian was so distracted that he couldn’t remember his next question for Tyler. He looked at Stefi thoughtfully. She was the best writer in the class and everyone admired her—everyone except Tyler. Stefi and Tyler always argued.

Brian hadn't planned on a question about Stefi, so he just asked the first thing that came to mind. "Tyler, you and Stefi argue all the time, but you actually like her, don't you?"

Tyler blushed. "I—well, not—"

BUZZ!

"WHOA!" Tyler jumped in his seat, so surprised at the unexpected sound of the lie detector buzzer that it seemed he really was being shocked.

"Ha-ha! Tyler likes Stefi," a girl teased, setting off giggles among the sixth graders in the audience.

"Liar, liar!" a boy shouted.

Hoker stood up and strode to the front of the room. "Calm down right now," he said sternly.

The sixth graders calmed down. After all, their parents were there.

Tyler was still bright red from embarrassment.

Brian removed the strap from Tyler's arm. "Thank you, Tyler. Sorry."

Tyler took a seat in the front row of the audience and glowered at Brian.

Brian wished he knew why Tyler was so upset, but he decided that for now, he should just worry about the presentation. "Connor, it's your turn."

"I'm not sure we need another demonstration," Hoker whispered to Brian.

"Please let me try again," Brian whispered. "I have something special prepared. I think everyone will love it."

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Hoker nodded and returned to his seat.

Connor, whose dream was to become a Major League Baseball star, stood up and put on his Yankees cap. Connor's back was to the audience, so no one saw him give Brian a thumbs up signal. No one noticed Brian's quick nod in response. Connor sat in the chair beside the lie detector.

Brian adjusted the lie detector strap to fit Connor's arm. He turned the dial to JOLT! "If you tell a lie, you may not survive."

There was a sharp gasp from the audience.

"Did you train Polly to talk?" Brian asked Connor in a stern voice.

"Yes."

"Did you ever—"

"Aawk! Strike one!" Polly interrupted, imitating Connor's voice perfectly.

"Quiet, Polly," Connor whispered, glancing at Mr. Hoker.

Brian ignored Polly and continued the presentation. "Connor, did you ever skip homework to watch a Yankees game?"

"Um..." Connor hesitated. "N-n-no."

BUZZ!

"OUCH!" Connor's whole body started shaking as if electricity were racing through. (It wasn't.)

"You're hurting him!" Tyler yelled from the audience. "Brian, turn it off!"

Connor moaned in agony and clutched his head—well, his Yankees cap.

Smoke poured from Connor's head. Actually, it came from a smoke button from a magic trick kit that Brian had placed in Connor's cap. Connor activated it when he clutched his head, pressing the button hidden under his Yankees cap. No one had noticed because Connor's acting was so good.

Connor trembled and shook. Finally, he fell still. His arms went limp. His chin dropped to his chest. His eyelids fluttered and closed.

"You killed him!" Tyler ran to the front of the room and shoved Brian aside. He grabbed Connor's arm and frantically searched for a pulse.

"Doctor coming through!" Brian's little sister, Isa, yelled as their mother rushed to help. Hoker followed.

Dr. Ferguson pushed Tyler away. She felt for Connor's pulse and checked that he was breathing.

"Connor, open your eyes and show everyone you're not hurt." She turned to face Brian. "BRIAN ALEXANDER REYNOLDS FERGUSON THE THIRD, WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?"

Brian was stunned by his mother's fury. He looked away guiltily and scanned the audience. Why did everyone look angry? Couldn't they tell this was supposed to be a joke?

So much for showing he could be cool. Brian had proven once again that he just didn't understand other people.

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Connor sat up in the chair. “I’m sorry, Dr. Ferguson. I didn’t know I was such a good actor.”

Brian’s mom raised one eyebrow. “I think the smoke button my son put in your cap helped your acting quite a bit.” She removed the smoke button from Connor’s Yankees cap and put it in her pocket. “Brian, I’ll talk to you later about borrowing things from your brother’s room while he is away at college.”

Tyler was still shaking from being worried about Connor, but he covered it up with anger. “I can’t believe you helped Brian play a prank!”

“Well, his idea was cool,” Connor said. “But you wouldn’t even listen to it...”

“Some friend!” Tyler ranted, waving both fists in the air. “You planned this to make me look like an idiot!”

“I did not!” Connor protested. “I was just trying to help Brian. How was I supposed to know you would practically give me a funeral?”

The sixth graders laughed at Tyler for the second time that morning. Tyler growled at them and turned to an easy target—Brian. “So your real name is Brian Alexander Reynolds Ferguson?”

“The third,” Brian mumbled.

People in the audience were no longer angry. They were painfully aware that Brian felt totally humiliated.

Dr. Ferguson looked apologetic. Brian knew she had not meant to say his full name in public. She hadn’t even picked

it. His dad had his heart set on naming him, ugh—Brian Alexander Reynolds Ferguson III, after his great-grandfather and great-great grandfather. For a certified genius, sometimes his father wasn't very smart.

If only Brian had been named for his mother's side of the family!

Brian hung his head. He dreaded what was coming next. Brian the Brain was nothing compared to what the kids would call him now.

“Your initials spell BARF,” Tyler sneered. “Forget Brian the Brain. From now on, we'll call you Barfy!”