



Bronx Boy: A Memoir

Jerome Charyn

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Jerome Charyn's three-part memoir of his boyhood in the Bronx has all the imagery and color of an enchanting and entertaining novel -- someone has said that it captures the author's world so accurately that it can't possibly be true. *Bronx Boy*, like *The Dark Lady of Belorusse* and *The Black Swan*, both selected by *The New York Times* as Notable Books of the Year, is a tour de force of memory and imagination. In this third and final installment, the higher truths of a masterly writer's art render moot the question of exactly where the real world ends and Charyn's imagined world begins.

Still known as "Baby" although a younger brother has come along, young Charyn makes pocket money delivering eggs, belongs to a group of 12-year-old wannabe gangsters that meet in a soda shop run by an ex-con, and spends afternoons telling stories to the adoring wife of a wealthy Russian émigré. He becomes famous for his black-and-tans -- a concoction of coffee ice cream, seltzer, milk, chocolate sauce, crushed pecans -- and "a touch of bitterness that may have been the Bronx." So famous, indeed, that he walks away the winner of an annual black-and-tan contest sponsored by the real-life top gangster called "The Little Man" -- Meyer Lansky.

In Charyn's hands, the often ridiculed Bronx is a magic place, as full of odd and wonderful characters as a three-ring circus. And at the center of it all, young "Baby," not as lucky in love as he would like to be, drinking it all in, putting his own extraordinary take on it. Charyn looks back at this with his singular vision, and records it all for us with the skill of the fine writer he is. This is a delightful and often moving story of a childhood that could only have been lived in New York in the fifties, a New York experience that could only have taken place in the Bronx of those days, a growing-up saga that could only have been captured by this singular author.

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