



CHRIS FABRY

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *June Bug*

Every Waking
MOMENT

A NOVEL

Praise for Chris Fabry

Borders of the Heart

“A thoroughly enjoyable read. . . . Chris Fabry is a masterful storyteller.”

CBA RETAILERS+RESOURCES

“In this edge-of-your-seat romantic suspense, all of the characters ring true. . . .”

BOOKLIST, STARRED REVIEW

“In this suspense-filled drama, Fabry covers hot topics. . . . Readers will be immersed in the lives of Maria and J. D.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“[*Borders of the Heart* is] character driven with strong characters facing moral dilemmas.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Ups the ante for fans of Fabry’s high-charged, emotionally driven fiction by adding a strong suspense thread.”

TITLETRAKK.COM

Not in the Heart

“A story of hope, redemption, and sacrifice. . . . It’s hard to imagine inspirational fiction done better than this.”

WORLD MAGAZINE

“Christy Award–winning Fabry has written a nail-biter with plenty of twists and turns. Fans of Jerry B. Jenkins and Jodi Picoult might want to try this title.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“A fine piece of storytelling. . . . Down to its final pages, *Not in the Heart* is a gripping read. While the mystery at its core is compelling, it’s Wiley’s inner conflict that’s truly engrossing.”

CROSSWALK.COM

“This absorbing novel should further boost Fabry’s reputation as one of the most talented authors in Christian fiction.”

CBA RETAILERS+RESOURCES

“The best book I have read in a long time. The plot is unique and creative . . . [and] manages to keep the reader hanging until the last page.”

READERVIEWS.COM

Almost Heaven

“[A] mesmerizing tale . . . [*Almost Heaven*] will surprise readers in the best possible way; plot twists unfold and unexpected character transformations occur throughout this tender story.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Fabry has a true gift for prose, and [*Almost Heaven*] is amazing. . . . You’ll most definitely want to move this to the top of your ‘to buy’ list.”

ROMANTIC TIMES, 4½-STAR TOP PICK REVIEW

“Fabry is a talented writer with a lilting flow to his words.”

CROSSWALK.COM

June Bug

“[*June Bug*] is a stunning success, and readers will find themselves responding with enthusiastic inner applause.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“An involving novel with enough plot twists and dramatic tension to keep readers turning the pages.”

BOOKLIST

“I haven’t read anything so riveting and unforgettable since *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers. . . . A remarkable love story, filled with sacrifice, hope, and forgiveness!”

NOVEL REVIEWS

“Precise details of places and experiences immediately set you in the story, and the complex, likable characters give *June Bug* the enduring quality of a classic.”

TITLETRAKK.COM

Dogwood

“[*Dogwood*] is difficult to put down, what with Fabry’s surprising plot resolution and themes of forgiveness, sacrificial love, and suffering.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Ultimately a story of love and forgiveness, [*Dogwood*] should appeal to a wide audience.”

CBA RETAILERS+RESOURCES

“Solidly literary fiction with deep, flawed characters and beautiful prose, *Dogwood* also contains a mystery within the story that adds tension and a deepening plot.”

NOVEL REVIEWS

Every Waking Moment



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MOMENT

A NOVEL

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Before



TREHA IMAGINED IT like this: A summer afternoon. Her mother's satin dress billowing. Fully leaved, green trees swaying. Crossing a busy street.

"Keep up with me, Treha," her mother said.

Looking into the sunlight, she saw the silhouette of her mother's face with beads of sweat on her lip and the wide-brimmed hat casting shade. Her mother not quite smiling but showing dazzling teeth. Deep-red lipstick. Like a movie star with a hint of concern on her face.

Momentum carried them to the sidewalk and the corner shop with the tinkling bell as they passed the red bricks and moved into the cool, sweet air smells and bright colors under a sign that said *Ice Cream*.

Her mother led her to the glass case that held the containers. Treha stood on tiptoes but wasn't tall enough to see over the edge, so her mother picked her up and held her, letting her hover above the colors. She pointed out the ones with dark specks and those with pecans and pralines or cookies or M&M's.

"Which one would you like? The orange? Yellow? Don't take all day now."

The man behind the counter wore a white apron and wiped

his hands and smiled. Behind him on the wall was a clock with a fish symbol in the middle and a second hand that jerked around the face.

Treha chose the pink, purple, and yellow all mixed together, and her mother put her on the floor. Treha studied the tile, the way the patterns worked together in threes. Triangles that made up squares that made up bigger triangles and squares. Black-and-white patterns she could see when she closed her eyes.

“Cone or cup?” the man said.

“Cup,” she said quickly, like she knew the cup lasted longer. You got more ice cream that way and less all over you.

“You’re a smart girl,” her mother said, sitting her on a chair next to a round table. The top was green and smooth and cool to the touch. “And so pretty.”

There was something in her mother’s eye that she wiped away. Dust? A bit of water?

The man brought the cup filled to overflowing, with a plastic spoon standing at attention. Her mother paid him and he went back to the register, then returned to them.

“How old is she?” the man said, handing her mother the change.

“Almost two.”

“Adorable. She’s a living doll.”

He spoke as if Treha weren’t there, as if she were an inanimate object incapable of understanding words.

Her mother knelt on the tile arranged in threes, the design continuing to infinity. She dabbed a napkin at the corners of Treha’s mouth. As hard as Treha tried to stay neat and clean, she always got the ice cream on her face and hands and dress. Maybe that was why it happened. She was adorable and a doll but too much trouble.

“I need to step out. You wait here, okay?”

Treha studied her as she took another spoonful and carefully placed it in her mouth.

Her mother kissed her forehead and whispered in her ear, “I love you, my sweet princess.”

She said something with her eyes before she stood but Treha could not decipher the message. Something between the words, something behind the stare, interconnected but dangling, like a loose thread in an unwanted scarf.

The bell jingled behind her and Treha looked back long enough to see her mother disappear into traffic, lost in sunlight.

When she finished the ice cream, the man came to the table and took the cup. “Where’s your mama?”

She stared at him with those brown eyes, wide like saucers. Milky-white skin untainted by the sun. Ice cream spots on her pretty dress that she tried to wipe away but couldn’t.

“You want another scoop?”

She shook her head. Her chin puckered. Somehow she knew. The world had tilted a little. She was alone.

The man walked to the door and looked out. Scratched his head with the brim of the white hat, then put it back on.

Treha swung her legs from the chair and looked at the sign behind the counter, the lines that connected to form words she did not understand. Words on walls and hats and buildings and cars. Letters bunched in threes and fours and more to make sentences and stories. Her story. The one she didn’t know. The one she tried hard to remember but never could. The one she had to make up.

CHAPTER I

ARDETH WILLIAMS was eighty-nine and her eyes were glassy and clouded. She stared straight ahead with a slight head tilt as her daughter and son-in-law wheeled her past open doors at Desert Gardens of Tucson, Arizona. The companion building, Desert Gardens Retirement Home, was a fully staffed facility featuring its own golf course, a spa, exercise rooms, and several pools. But this Desert Gardens offered assisted living and hospice, a nursing home with frills. It was billed on the brochure as a complete end-of-life facility located in the comfort of an upscale desert community.

Miriam Howard, director of the facility, followed the group closely, watching Ardeth for any response. She couldn't tell if anything was going on behind the opaque eyes. The old woman's body sat rigid, her hands drawn in. Her head bounced like a marionette's as her son-in-law pushed her.

Retirement was bearing down on Miriam like a semitruck trying to make it through a yellow light. It was a huge transition Miriam had dreamed about, but now that she could measure her remaining time in hours instead of days or weeks, she couldn't suppress the sadness. This wasn't her timing. But the

decision had been made by the board and the new director was moving in.

She had developed a facility that actually cared for people inside the “compound,” as some cantankerous residents called it. There was human capital here and she knew it. And she hoped the new director would learn the same. The woman was on the job already, learning procedures, the problem residents, soaking up the routine, uncovering the scope and magnitude of her duties.

“Aren’t these flowers the prettiest?” Ardeth’s daughter said when they reached the room. “It’s so bright in here, don’t you think? And clean. They’ll keep it neat for you, Mom, and you don’t have to do a thing. You always kept everything so tidy and now you won’t have to worry about that. Isn’t that great?”

The daughter didn’t realize this was part of the problem. The same tasks that wore her mother down were the tasks that gave her structure and stability. Worth. When she could no longer do them and others were paid to accomplish things she had done as long as she could remember, life became a calendar of guilt—every day lived as a spectator, watching others do what she couldn’t and being reminded with each breakfast made by someone else’s hands. Miriam saw this clearly but could never fully explain the truth to families crunching numbers on the cost of warehousing the aged.

“You’ll have a nice view of the parking lot, too,” her son-in-law said, tongue in cheek. “All those fancy cars the employees drive.” His hair was graying and it was clear he and his wife were having a hard time letting go, though they were trying to be strong.

He pushed the wheelchair farther into the narrow room and struggled past the bed.

“She can’t see the TV facing that way,” his wife snapped. She turned the chair around, jostling the old woman.

Miriam had seen this tug-of-war for thirty years. The walk of a hopeless family trying to love well but failing. Everyone watching a parent slip away shot flares of anger that were really masqueraded loss. Deciding what Mother would like or wouldn’t was a seesaw between two relatives who were guessing. Love looked like this and worse and was accompanied by a mute, white-haired shell.

When Ardeth was situated, the man locked the wheels clumsily and patted her spotted hand as he bent to her ear. “Here we are. What do you think, Mom? Do you want this to be your home?”

Nothing from the old woman. Not a grunt or a wave of the hand. No scowl. No recognition. Behind the cataracts and age and wrinkles, there was simply bewilderment. And even a casual observer could sense the fear. Could taste it in the air. But this scene brought out Miriam’s strength.

She sat on the bed beside Ardeth. In the early days, before she had learned the valuable lessons that came with running the facility, she would have spoken as if the old woman weren’t there or weren’t aware. Now, she gently put a hand on Ardeth’s shoulder and spoke softly, including her.

“Ardeth will not just be a patient if she comes here,” Miriam said. “She will be part of our family. Part of our village. And there are things she will contribute to the whole that others can’t.”

The daughter hung on every word. Mouth agape. Water filling her eyes.

Miriam continued. “What you’re doing, the process you’re going through, is a loving one. I know it doesn’t feel like that.

You're having a hard time even considering this, and your heart is telling you to take her home, where she belongs."

The man crossed his arms and looked away, but the daughter nodded. "That's exactly it. I just want to take care of her. We're overreacting. She put up with so much from me; the least I can do is return the favor."

Miriam smiled. "That's a viable option. But if Ardeth was to stay with us, I want you to know that you won't be abandoning her. You're giving her the best care possible."

The daughter took her mother's hand. "I want to be here for her."

"Of course. And she knows that, though she can't express it."

The woman pulled a tissue from a full, decorative box on the nightstand and wiped at her eyes.

"Our goal is to give each resident the best care," Miriam said. "Late at night, early in the morning, all of those who work here strive to give the attention each person needs. If you decide this is the best, you can rest easy. Ardeth will lack for nothing."

A bead of saliva pooled at the edge of the old woman's mouth and gravity did its work. Her daughter leaned forward, taking another tissue to catch the bead as it ran down her chin.

"I don't want her to be in bed all day," the daughter said, her voice breaking, her tone accusatory. She caught herself and put a hand on her chest. "But that was happening at home. I hated leaving her in front of the television, but I have things to do and I can't take her with me." She was whispering now.

Miriam knew it was time to be quiet.

The daughter went on. "I want her to do the things she loves. Gardening and reading. She loves life. She loves our children. You only see her this way, the vacant stare, but there's a vibrant woman in there. Giving and kind. But she gets upset

when she can't remember things and then she gets angry, and I can't . . .”

More tears. Head down and retreating to tissues.

Miriam scooted to the edge of the bed and leaned toward the daughter. Trust was her most important commodity. The family had to place their full faith in her and the staff. “I know exactly what you're going through, and I wouldn't blame you if you took your mother and got in the car and drove home. This is the hardest decision I ever had to make.”

“You've done this?”

“Yes. My own mother. Of course, it was easier bringing her here, knowing I'd be working with her every day. But seeing her lose that independence, that sense of dignity—it felt like giving up. Like one more loss in a long line of them. And you want the losses to stop. You just want the old life back. The person you knew.”

The woman nodded. “Exactly.”

It was time for words again. Miriam felt the spotlight. The moment when things either came together or disintegrated.

“I want to be honest. As I look at you, I see that strong woman your mother was. Confident and caring and full of life. Only wanting the best for those you love. I want that person you knew to return. But the truth is, this may be the best we achieve. Today, having her here and comfortable and not agitated . . . that may be as good as we get. Are you okay with that? If this is as good as it gets, can you let go and rest in that?”

“I don't know what you're asking.”

Miriam leaned forward, her elbows on her knees. “Your love for your mother is not conditional on her response. You love her for who she is. You don't love her because of the things she can do for you.”

The daughter nodded.

“So no matter what happens—if she improves, remains like this, or if she regresses—her condition is not the point. We always hope and pray for progress. But if you don’t get the response you’d like, are you willing to accept that and just love her? That’s where I see you struggling.”

The woman’s face clouded. “You’re saying I don’t love my mother if I don’t let her stay here?”

The man put a hand on his wife’s shoulder. “Let’s cut the sales job, Mrs. Howard. Your job is to convince us to spend the money Ardeth has saved and put it into this place so you can keep building your little geriatric empire.”

Miriam pursed her lips. The anger wasn’t new. She had heard much more creative and acerbic accusations. She disregarded the charge and focused on the daughter.

“Let me try again. What I’m calling you to do is to see reality. Not how things might be or could be, but how they are. This is the baseline we work from. And when you embrace that, not requiring change but accepting where you are, where she is, then wonderful things can happen. Your heart can rest. You won’t feel guilty about what you’ve done or haven’t done. You can simply love her.”

The daughter thought a moment, ruminating on the words. Processing.

Miriam wished she could film this interaction for her successor—it was a classic scene she had seen repeated a thousand times with varying results.

“My biggest fear is that she’ll fall. That if she stays with us, she won’t be safe. But you can’t guarantee . . .” There was raw emotion in the words. The daughter looked up, pleading, almost begging.

“Our highest priority is her safety and comfort. But our goal for Ardeth doesn’t stop there—or with her surviving a few years. We want her to thrive. And in whatever ways she can integrate into our family, our community, we’re going to help her do that. We’ll give her opportunities to be involved at whatever level she’s able.”

Her husband leaned forward. His voice was high-pitched and came out nearly whining. “This is not making her part of your community. It doesn’t take a village to care for my mother-in-law, especially when it costs this much.”

Miriam turned to him with a smile. “If the best place for Ardeth is your home or some other facility, I would not want her to move here.”

The old woman leaned in her chair, her body ramrod straight but listing like the Tower of Pisa.

Miriam addressed the daughter again. “You mentioned reading. What does she like to read? What music does she enjoy? We can provide recorded books and music. That adds such a quality of life.”

The daughter’s eyes came alive. “You could do that? When she was younger, she read *Little Women* to me. I hated it. Now it’s one of the treasures of my life.” She rattled off several other book titles and music from the 1940s—Benny Goodman, George Gershwin, Glenn Miller, and Tommy Dorsey.

“Oh, great,” the man said. “You charge extra for CDs of the big band era?” He walked to the window and stood, looking out.

“My mother loved ‘Indian Summer,’” Miriam said, ignoring him. “I still have some of those CDs. Bing Crosby. Frank Sinatra. The Andrews Sisters.”

It was a rapturous look, the face of the daughter, and Miriam

knew she had opened something, a pathway leading to a connection with another resident.

“I don’t want her wasting away in an institution. She’s gone downhill so quickly. It’s hard to watch.”

“The process is never easy. But you’re not losing her.”

“That’s what it feels like. Even if she gets to read books and hear music, it feels like she’s moving on without us.” The woman’s eyes misted and she dropped her gaze to the floor.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway and Miriam glanced up as Treha passed the room. Miriam called to her, and the young woman took three heavy steps backward in a modified moonwalk, her blue scrubs swishing, and stood in the doorway. She stared at a spot just above the floor and swayed, her brown hair gathered in a clip on top of her head, emphasizing her strong features—high cheekbones, a well-defined nose, dark brows and lashes, and ears that bent forward, as if her parents might have been elves.

Miriam spoke to the daughter. “This is a young lady who works with us. She would be one of the caretakers for your mother.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” the daughter said.

The girl nodded and her cheeks jiggled, but she didn’t make eye contact.

“She is a special young lady,” Miriam said. “A very hard worker. Would you mind if I introduce her to Ardeth?”

The daughter spoke tentatively. “I suppose it would be all right.”

The man studied the girl’s name tag and tried to pronounce it. “Is it *Tree-ha*?”

“*Tray-uh*,” Miriam corrected. “Why don’t you step inside a moment?”

The girl shuffled in, the untied laces of her black-and-white canvas Keds clicking on the tile. She glanced up at the woman and her husband and then quickly found another spot on the wall, her head swaying slightly.

“Treha, I want you to meet Ardeth. She may be coming to live with us.”

Treha looked at the old woman instead of averting her eyes. She tilted her head to one side and leaned forward, speaking in a soft voice like a timid actress unsure of her lines. The words sounded thick and unformed on her tongue.

“Hello, Mrs. Ardeth.”

The old woman didn’t respond, and Treha took another step and angled her body away. She leaned closer as if trying a different frequency on the woman’s receiver.

“Would you like to take Ardeth to the dayroom?” Miriam said.

Treha looked up, questioning with her eyes, asking and receiving something unspoken. She nodded, then gave Ardeth a light touch on the arm, the slightest feathery movement with a pudgy hand. There was no response.

Treha released the wheel locks and pushed the chair through the door with ease, gliding confidently, her body one with the chair and the old woman, as if they were made for one another.

“What will she do?” the daughter said.

Miriam tried to hide the smile, the inner joy. She didn’t want to promise something Treha couldn’t deliver. “Come with me.”