

CHRIS FABRY

*Bestselling author of War Room*

Under  
a  
loudless  
Sky



A NOVEL

# PRAISE FOR CHRIS FABRY



## *Under a Cloudless Sky*

“*Under a Cloudless Sky* captivated me from page one. I cared immediately what happened to Ruby and Bean, and the stakes kept rising as tidbits of history were revealed, unraveling the mystery that held Ruby captive. A terrific reading experience!”

FRANCINE RIVERS, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

## *The Promise of Jesse Woods*

“[In this] soul-searching novel of faith, friendship, and promises, Chris Fabry invigorates the small-town lives of three teens in 1970s West Virginia with his exquisite, lyrical writing. . . . A literary delight . . . this novel is worthy of a standing ovation.”

SHELF AWARENESS

“This riveting, no-punches-pulled coming-of-age tale is reminiscent of Richard Bachman’s (Stephen King) short story, ‘The Body,’ which was made into the movie *Stand by Me*.”

BOOKLIST

## *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

### *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, one that’s 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

### *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

### *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 to keep readers riveted. 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

### *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

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

TITLETRAKK.COM

### *Every Waking Moment*

“Writing in his trademark lyrical style, Fabry spins a poignant tale about our society’s invisible seniors and the woman and man who see their potential.”

BOOKLIST

“Christy Award–winning novelist Fabry crafts a character-driven tale of dignity and compassion for those who seem to have lost importance to society and, for some, even to their own families. This thought-provoking read challenges the prevailing cultural calculations of the value of a person’s life.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“The skillfully woven plot twists, intermingled with humor, angst, and questions of faith, make *Every Waking Moment* a true page-turner.”

HOMECOMING MAGAZINE

“*Every Waking Moment* has depth and beauty. I really don’t think I could say enough good things about this novel. It’s thrilling. It’s poignant. It’s touching. It’s deep. It’s beautiful. And it should be read.”

JOSH OLDS, LIFE IS STORY



UNDER A CLOUDLESS SKY





Under  
a  
Cloudless  
Sky

CHRIS FABRY



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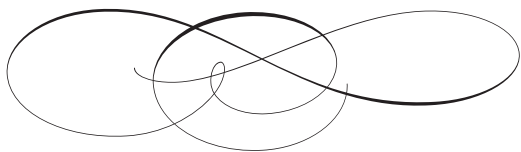
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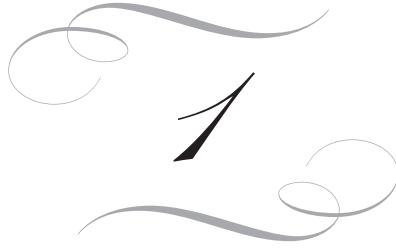
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*Part 1*







WE MEET RUBY AND BEAN  
BEULAH MOUNTAIN, WEST VIRGINIA  
JUNE 1933

Ruby and Bean met in the summer of 1933 in a town called Beulah Mountain, in the southwestern coalfields of West Virginia, shortly before the massacre that has become a footnote in some history books. When people speak of that time, they talk of red and black. Blood was the price paid and coal was the prize. Miners' families were collateral damage in a war against the earth itself, a battle fought with pick and TNT.

There are a thousand places to begin the story. Ruby and Bean's first meeting . . . Bean's big regret . . . where her name came from . . . the shock when they discovered what was happening on the third floor of the company store. But there is another memory that floats to the surface and sits on the water like a katydid on a lily pad. The memory is wrapped in music and preaching and two friends tripping

through the underbrush, hand in hand, giggling, and for a moment without a care in the world, the hurt and pain of life dismissed.

Ruby held on to Bean like a tight-eyed, newborn kitten, more afraid to let go than to hang on. She didn't know the hills like her friend, and the speed Bean gathered frightened Ruby. It is a grace to be able to hold on to someone who runs at life when you can only imagine walking.

"Slow down," Ruby said without a drawl, with a hint of northern refinement. To those in Beulah Mountain, Ruby sounded uppity, like she was putting on airs, and there were some in the congregation who questioned whether this daughter of a mine owner belonged in their church. Some thought she might be spying and trying to get information about the union rumors.

Ruby wore the dress her mother had picked from a catalog, a dress she only wore on Sundays and late at night when she couldn't sleep. This dress, other than the pictures and jewelry and sweet-smelling memorabilia she kept in a box on her dresser, was the last connection with her mother. The woman's voice was fading from memory, which troubled Ruby, though the fine contours of her mother's face and the rich brown hair and long eyelashes were still there when she closed her eyes.

Ruby's fingernails were finely trimmed and her hair shone in the sunlight as it bounced and wiggled in curls down her back. She wore pink ribbons that Mrs. Grigsby had positioned for her. Mrs. Grigsby, the wife of the company store proprietor, had been hired to watch Ruby and keep her from children who lived on the other side of the tracks, a task Mrs. Grigsby had failed at miserably. Like water and coal slurry, children will find their own worthy level and pool.

It is a fine thing to see two hearts beat as one. And the hearts of Ruby and Bean did that. Their friendship raised eyebrows at the beginning, of course, but in the summer of 1933, as the church bell rang, Bean pulled Ruby a little harder and their shoes slid down the

bank through the ferns and rhododendrons and saplings and onto the path that led toward the white church with the people streaming in from all sides of the mountain.

“I swear,” Bean said, “this church is the most excitement I have all week. It’s the only reason to stay in this town.”

“You’ll be here until the day you die, Bean, and you know it,” Ruby said.

“Will not,” Bean said. “I’m going to see the world. And take my mama with me. These hills can’t hold me.”

“Slow down!”

Bean’s shoes were held together with sea-grass string and prayer. Her fingernails were bit to the quick and dirty from gathering coal for the cookstove and plucking chickens and digging worms for fishing. Bean—given name Beatrice—was lean and tall for a twelve-year-old, and she had seen more than her share of pain. She had helped bury two brothers and a sister who had never given so much as a single cry. She had held her mother’s hand and comforted her when her father wasn’t around.

“Don’t never run for the doctor again,” her mother had said after the last stillborn child. “You’ve got to promise me.”

“Why, Mama?”

“That man don’t care a whit for people like us,” she said. “He just makes it harder. Next time I’m sick, don’t you get him. You hear?”

Bean had promised but didn’t understand the ramifications of such a thing and the turmoil it might bring.

Ruby was older than Bean, but not much. Bean was a lot stronger and tougher and her exterior was as rough as a cob (she ran barefoot most days). There could not be two girls on the planet who were from more different families, and yet, here they were.

“Hold up,” Bean said when they reached the edge of the woods.

Ruby was out of breath and welcomed the pause. “What is it?”

“Look there.”

Ruby saw movement and peered through the underbrush at an animal. Elegant. Stately. When its head passed a wide tree, she saw it was a deer.

“Ain’t it beautiful?” Bean said.

“Will he hurt us?” Ruby whispered.

“It’s a she and she probably has young ones. I’m glad my daddy isn’t here or he’d shoot her quick as look at her. We’d have venison for dinner but the view here wouldn’t be half as pretty.”

The deer stopped and looked straight at Ruby and Bean.

“Stay real still,” Bean whispered. “Deer know things people don’t.”

“What do you mean?” Ruby said. When she turned her head, the deer jumped and ran quickly into the brush.

Bean sighed. “They see things you and I can’t. If I could have been born as anything else, I’d have chosen a deer.”

Music from the old piano in the church lifted over the valley and Bean picked up her pace again. The heat and humidity of summer made the piano keys stick, but she recognized the introduction to her favorite hymn.

“Come on, we’re going to miss ‘Beulah,’” she said.

Though the church tried to keep the piano in tune, summer was hard on the instrument and winter was worse. Those occupying the pews sang louder each week to overcome the weathering effects on the Franklin upright. The piano’s story was rich—Bean’s father said it had been rescued and redeemed from a saloon in Matewan a few years prior, and before that it was used in a Chicago brothel that Al Capone had frequented and the bullet holes in the right side had been made by Bugs Moran. All of these stories seemed too wild for anyone but Ruby and Bean to believe, though neither knew what a “brothel” was. That a piano could be rescued and redeemed in a church felt like something God would do.

Benches creaked and snapped as the congregation stood, and nasal voices rose in unison as the girls neared the wooden steps. Bean let go

of her friend's hand, grabbed the iron railing, and catapulted to the top and through the door where an older man with only a few teeth looked down. Sopranos strained to overcome the off-key male voices.

*“Far away the noise of strife upon my ear is falling;  
Then I know the sins of earth beset on every hand;  
Doubt and fear and things of earth in vain to me are calling;  
None of these shall move me from Beulah Land.”*

Bean rushed past women waving fans and men who had freshly shaved and washed away as much coal dust as they could. She found her mother in her usual spot and the woman drew her in with one arm as Ruby joined them, out of breath but smiling.

*“I’m living on the mountain, underneath a cloudless sky,  
I’m drinking at the fountain that never shall run dry;  
Oh, yes! I’m feasting on the manna from a bountiful supply,  
For I am dwelling in Beulah Land.”*

Not every church service began with this hymn, but at some point on either Sunday morning or Sunday evening, the congregation raised its voice in praise to the God who allowed them to live in Beulah Mountain and long for their heavenly home.

Ruby had never heard such singing before moving to Beulah Mountain. She had taken piano lessons early and could read music on the page, a feat that amazed Bean. But what happened when these people sang was more than just humans hitting notes. The music seemed to come from somewhere deep inside and when their voices united, it felt like goose bumps on the soul. Something like joy bubbled up from inside her and leaked through her eyes.

When they had sung the requisite number of choruses and verses, the pews creaked again from the weight of slight men and women and

their children. There were soft coughs that would be termed *silicosis* in the years ahead, but for now it was simply a “coughing spell.” Ruby burrowed herself under Bean’s mother’s arm and Bean did the same on the other side. Though it was hot and muggy, and the pregnant woman between them would have been more comfortable being left alone, she spread her wings like a mother hen.

The pastor was a thick man with thin hair slicked back. He looked like a miner who had moved toward ministry, but he talked with a wheeze and Ruby sat enraptured by his words and the readings from the King James Bible that lay open on the pulpit in front of him. His name was printed on the bulletin at the bottom, H. G. Brace, and Ruby thought it humble of him that his name was so low on the page.

The text this day was from the book of Exodus, about the plight of the Israelites enslaved by cruel Pharaoh and the Egyptians who used the Israelites for their own devices, having forgotten all that Joseph had done. Joseph had interpreted the dream of Pharaoh and had saved the Egyptians, but a new leader had arisen who either didn’t know the story or didn’t care. Pastor Brace reminded them that Joseph’s brothers had meant to do him evil, but God brought good from it and could do the same in their lives.

There was a smattering of *amens* in the room, followed by more crusty coughing. As the pastor continued, Ruby leaned forward and noticed a commotion coming through the open windows. There was noise down the railroad tracks. The pastor continued until they heard the audible voices of miners shouting for help.



## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



I suppose I write to understand the world. I write to understand those who came before. Several things helped bring this story to life. The first was a photo of my father in a southern West Virginia coal camp, sitting next to his brother. I could have picked them both out of the picture because of my father's mouth and his brother's stoic gaze. Even at a young age their personalities were imprinted.

The second thing that sparked this story came from the words of my mother. Growing up in the Depression, in a place called Campbell's Creek, West Virginia, left a mark on her life she never forgot. I've asked several times if she would like to go back, to walk around the place where she grew up, and she's declined and not politely. The memories were too hard.

Several years after my father died, this story bubbled to the surface. To be honest, it was partly because she was driving and the family was concerned she was going to hurt herself, someone else, or both. (She drives a Buick, not a Town Car.) During the struggle, I saw the seed of a modern-day story that could reach through the years.

Then I came across a story about a company store museum in West Virginia and claims about the Esau scrip. Women of the era reported that sexual abuse occurred in some mining communities.

These stories of exploitation have been challenged by historians, but the stories made me wonder.

There is one more element that brought things together. I host a radio program called *Chris Fabry Live*. I've noticed, through the years, that many callers who are up in years will confide, with the right prompting, some difficult thing that happened years ago that they've never revealed to anyone. I've always believed this to be a great honor, to be entrusted with another person's past and hurts, but it is also a weight. As callers reveal themselves, I hear it in their voices. There is something taken from them in the telling, a load they have carried for decades. I can sometimes feel the removal of that thing they lay down in the phone call, and I often wonder why it took so long to put it there and if someone they know and love will help them move forward.

Then I look at my own life and the things I am carrying, things I've never told a soul, and the way those things hold me back from those I love. It is my hope that this story will remove some weight for you, that it will give you permission to allow some burden to be lifted so that there can be healing and wholeness and a lightness to your step, no matter how old or young you are.

I give thanks to my mother and father, their parents, and those whose stories have been handed down. To the people of West Virginia, who quietly go about life without fanfare or the need for it. For my wife and children, of course, who put up with me climbing the stairs humming a hymn they've never heard. For Karen Watson, Stephanie Broene, and the fabulous Sarah Rische, who take my words and help me rearrange them so they make more sense.