

"If you're looking to have fun and you like country, this is the story for you." DON REID, THE STATLER BROTHERS

CHRIS FABRY

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF WAR ROOM

A

PIECE

of the

MOON



Praise for Chris Fabry

A Piece of the Moon

“*A Piece of the Moon* has it all. Quirky, endearing characters. A rich story arc full of surprises. Lines so funny you’ll want to read them aloud to anybody within earshot. And a tender thread of redemption that runs from first page to last. Spending time with Waite and TD and Clay and Pidge and all the other folks in Emmaus was pure joy. The best novel I’ve read in ages.”

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *MINE IS THE NIGHT*

“Few earthlings spin a more endearing, heartwarming yarn than Chris Fabry. The guy is a national treasure. *A Piece of the Moon* is an instant classic because it takes you someplace new, a place filled with off-kilter characters who make you laugh and tear up, a place you don’t want to leave. This book brought joy, lack of sleep, and a pain in my right arm. I sprained my wrist turning pages.”

PHIL CALLAWAY, HOST OF *LAUGH AGAIN* RADIO, AUTHOR OF *LAUGH LIKE A KID AGAIN*

“*A Piece of the Moon* represents what I love most about fiction: the ability a novel has to transport you to another place in time. Fabry’s voice as a writer is engaging and dripping with charm and nostalgia. It took me back to the years of small radio stations and the earthy music of the old days. The fact that it comes with its own playlist is a brilliant way to reintroduce some of the great music of the past to new audience. A fantastic story written by an absolute treasure of a human being. I highly recommend *A Piece of the Moon* (and by the way, isn’t that a great title!).”

CINDY MORGAN, AUTHOR AND GRAMMY NOMINEE

“Chris Fabry has done it again! If you’re looking to have fun and you like country, this is the story for you. The characters jump off the pages and into your heart and you’ll be smiling at what they said and

what they did for weeks to come. Each chapter is full of people you would just swear you know from your own hometown!”

DON REID, THE STATLER BROTHERS

Under a Cloudless Sky

“Fabry captures the political and social climate of an Appalachian mining community in this evocative novel set between 1933 and 2004. . . . Fabry weaves the events of the past and present into a finely layered story exploring the relationships of faith, forgiveness, and family in the midst of healing from pain buried deep in the past.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Fabry’s latest is a multilayered, engaging story with rich details and interesting characters. Thanks to the historical coal mining backstory, *Under a Cloudless Sky* should appeal to both readers of Southern historical fiction and inspirational fiction.”

RT BOOK REVIEWS

“A poignant story of innocence, good people in hard circumstances, misunderstood family relationships, deeply buried wounds, and the healing of God’s grace. A definite must-read!”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“*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

“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

“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

A Piece of the Moon

OTHER NOVELS BY CHRIS FABRY

Under a Cloudless Sky

The Promise of Jesse Woods

Every Waking Moment

Looking into You

Dogwood

June Bug

Almost Heaven

Not in the Heart

Borders of the Heart

A Marriage Carol (with Dr. Gary Chapman)

War Room

(based on the screenplay

by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick)

Overcomer

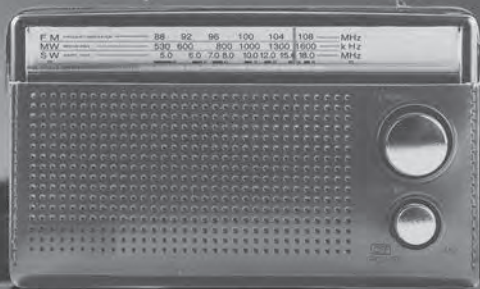
(based on the screenplay

by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick)

The Song (based on the screenplay by Richard L. Ramsay)

CHRIS FABRY

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Some Scripture referenced by characters has been paraphrased by the author.

A Piece of the Moon is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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PROLOGUE

LOVE, LIKE TREASURE, stays buried until somebody decides to dig. That's what this story is about, along with life and death and a stammering tongue and a little radio station. It's also about the power of an old country song. Mostly it's about events that occurred in the summer of 1981, set in motion by a fellow named Gideon Quidley, who was, in my opinion at the time, several bales short of a full loft.

The whole thing started a few years earlier, the year his wife, Opal, died, which was the same year the Nixon administration came apart at the seams and Sam Ervin talked about being an "old country lawyer" in the Senate Caucus Room. That was the year Gideon said he heard the Lord speak.

"Get thee up and gather thy fortune and fashion an ark. Hide thou the treasure in the hills where thou art from and fashion thee a map using my Word as a compass. I will use thee to turn many toward truth."

The Almighty spoke in King James, Gideon said, and though Gideon didn't understand all he heard, he was the type to fling himself full bore at life, as he had done when he was involved with the space program. So he gathered his gold and silver and withdrew stacks of hundred-dollar bills he secured with rubber bands, and using specifications from the book of Exodus, he drew a schematic of the Ark of the Covenant. But since he was an engineer and not a carpenter, he spent considerable time creating something only a craftsman should attempt. And by the time that truth dawned on him, there was a peanut farmer in the White House.

Gideon eventually contracted with a company in Gallipolis, Ohio, that specialized in “unique, handcrafted furniture,” and drew up a legal document that forced the company's silence in perpetuity. Then he got busy with the Almighty's second directive.

The map conundrum—“fashion thee a map using my Word as a compass”—vexed Gideon, but the upside was he was able to focus on something other than Opal's death. And that was a grace to him. He thought of Opal every day, of course, and felt an ache at night as he stared at her empty pillow. The truth was, Gideon not only heard the Lord, he also heard Opal say, “*Gid, you have lost your marbles.*” That made him smile and he fell asleep with tears and dreams so real he was sad to wake from them.

One summer night, as the moon rose high and bright and peeked into his bedroom window like a star of wonder, Gideon sat straight up in bed.

“That's it!”

His voice startled his dog, Jubal, who barked outside as Gideon raced to his desk where he kept his Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and his Bible dictionary, as well as his underlined and dog-eared red-letter edition of the KJV. In a frenzy, he wrote chapter and verse, Scriptures flowing like the river Jordan. His

theme was true treasure, and he presented biblical clues for eternal life.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

When he'd transcribed the eternal-treasure clues, he then searched for verses that might pinpoint coordinates of a specific hiding place in the hills. But that's when he came up empty. Being a man of faith who was content with all he knew and didn't know, Gideon gave thanks for the moonlight flash of inspiration and went outside to feed Jubal. And as he poured the Alpo, he glanced at the sky and saw the fading orb that had awakened him, and in that moment he decided to place his most valuable possession in the ark, a priceless treasure only Gideon and Opal and one other man on the planet knew he owned.

In celebration, he dressed and drove into town to his favorite diner and sat with his Bible in front of him. When the waitress brought eggs and hash browns and toast, no butter, he folded his hands and thanked the Lord for his kindness and beseeched him again for wisdom.

“Show it to me, Lord. I've put the map to eternal life together. Now I need your help to know where to hide the treasure.”

After the prayer, he poured a copious amount of ketchup, salt, and pepper on his eggs and hash browns, took a bite, then flipped open the Bible as if it were a wet fleece. And it came to pass that verily the pages fell open to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, and there it was, staring at him. The word jumped off the page twice in the same chapter, telling him exactly what to do. He'd found the oxcart, as it were, that would transport his ark.

“Thank you, Lord,” Gideon whispered. “I'll put the ark inside. But where do I hide it? What spot are you calling me to?”

He pinched the pages, like you would pick up a Communion

wafer, closed his eyes, and flipped again and the pages fell open to Luke 24. His eyes tracked down the page until he stopped, unable to breathe. The location could not have been any clearer if the Almighty had spoken aloud.

After breakfast, he left a modest tip for Wilma, the waitress who always took his order, and he got in his half-ton Chevy C10 and drove directly to a car dealer in town and set his plan in motion.

In the end, that plan would lead to division and death, as well as riches untold and a search for love and forgiveness. Whether he actually heard from the Lord, I'll let you decide.

PART 1



CHAPTER 1

MONDAY, JULY 6, 1981

Robby Gardner let the rope slide through his gloved hands as he descended a rock wall near Ephra, West Virginia. He paused a moment to catch his breath and still his racing heart, glancing at the vista he would never forget. Stretching out as far as he could see was God's green earth, trees and hills and lichen-covered rocks, gorgeous and untouched as Eden.

Fifty feet below was a ledge he had spied a week earlier from the other side of the ravine. Sunlight peeking through the clouds had glinted in the recesses of the rock, and with binoculars he spotted a sparkle of gold.

Every day since then he had thought of that sight, and the world seemed a little brighter and more colorful. And something close to hope rose inside. On this Monday morning, he had told

no one where he was headed, not even his wife, and as he paused, the rope tight and his feet firmly planted against this rock wall, he thought of her and how they had begun their morning by quietly making love while their children slept.

When Sharon rose from the bed, he watched her, then turned toward the light peeking through the window and thought that outside of salvation, Monday sex was God's best gift. He'd written that in his journal a few times, and he wondered if, in the future, his wife or his children would find his intimate scribblings and blush or just shake their heads and smile. *That Robby. What a rascal.*

This is the last time she'll have sex with a poor pastor, Robby had thought. *After today, everything changes.*

He had dressed and gathered his things and waited in the kitchen. Sharon came out with raised eyebrows. "What got into you, tiger?"

"You," he said. He gave her a hug, her hair smelling like a field of ripe strawberries. He kissed her neck and pulled back and looked into her eyes.

"I thought you'd sleep in today," she said. "Where are you off to so early?"

He didn't answer. He just studied her like a spy on the border of a land flowing with milk and honey.

She cocked her head to one side. "Please tell me you're not still looking."

"I'm not still looking."

"Then where are you going?"

"I'm not still looking because I've found what I was looking for."

"Aww," she said, smiling. She thought he meant her. Then her face turned blank when she realized he didn't. "Robby, don't do this. Let it go."

“You’re going to be singing a different tune when I get back.”

“You said you were done with this.”

“I was. And then I saw something. It was between the lines.”

“Between what lines?”

He put his hands on her shoulders and leaned toward her. “Think of the things we could do. We could finally go on a honeymoon. We never had one.”

“I don’t need a honeymoon.”

“We could give enough to build that orphanage your parents have talked about down in Mexico. Send it to the mission board so they can build ten orphanages.”

She crossed her arms and looked away. “I got a bad feeling about this.”

“And I got the best feeling in the world. All the struggle we’ve been through. All the praying and hoping for things to get better. The Lord knew we needed this. And he’s let me figure out what nobody else has.”

“Robby, you know deep down there’s nothing out there. People say the only ones crazier than Quidley are those who believe he actually hid a treasure.”

“I’m glad they feel that way. It’s not as crowded. And it’s right there in my grasp. I’ve seen it, Sharon.”

She pulled away. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve seen the gold. I’ve seen the seraphim.”

Her face grew tight. “I don’t want you to go.”

“And you know I have to.”

“You don’t have to. Stay. We could take the kids to the lake and have a picnic. You can fish. Relax.”

“Everything changes after today.”

She sighed, her shoulders slumping. Then she grabbed a Bible beside the telephone and pulled his hand on top. “Promise.”

“Promise what?”

“Promise if you don’t find it this time, that’ll be it. You’ll stop.”

He thought a moment. Then with one hand on the Bible, he raised the other and stood tall. “I solemnly swear that if I don’t find the treasure of Gideon Quidley today, I will stop looking and henceforth abandon the search forevermore, amen.”

“So help you God?”

“So help me God.”

He laughed and tried to tickle her, but she squirmed away and opened the refrigerator, looking inside. “Want me to fix us something?”

“I’m too keyed up to eat. I’ll get coffee at the gas station. Then I’m on the road to riches. I can’t wait. Now I probably won’t bring the whole thing back—it’ll be too heavy. But I’ve got a backpack I’ll fill with gold and silver to show you I was right.”

She shook her head. “Where are you looking?”

“First clue. Psalm 121. ‘I lift my eyes to the hills.’ The treasure’s in West Virginia. No doubt about it.”

“Why wouldn’t he hide it closer to where he lives? Pennsylvania has hills.”

“He was born and bred here. Trust me. I’ve done my homework.”

“What town?”

He kissed her forehead. “I’ll tell you when I get back.”

“Robby, how far away are you going? At least tell me that.”

He looked at his watch. “I’ll be home this afternoon.”

As he backed down the gravel driveway, she was standing at the front window, her arms crossed over her breasts, looking plaintive, like it might be the last time she ever saw him. He couldn’t wait to see her face when she saw what he brought back.

After the gas station, he popped in a cassette of his favorite pastor from Memphis, taking mental notes for his own sermon the

following Sunday. Two hours later he drove off the road and up a hill as far he could, then hid his truck in a grove of willow trees. He grabbed his gear and climbed to the top of the hill, using saplings to pull himself up the steep slope. At the edge of the rock face, he looked over the ravine. What a sight.

Robby had been a fair athlete in his younger days. Good enough to play high school ball. Now he'd put on a few pounds and after the climb he felt the old knee injury. This wasn't like walking hospital corridors or playing church softball.

He tied the rope tightly and took a breath, then gingerly descended. He was so close to the treasure of Gideon Quidley he could taste it.

What would people think when they heard? What would his tiny congregation do when they discovered their pastor had put the clues together? He could see himself on TV, Phil Donahue asking him questions. He'd explain how it finally dawned on him as he studied the life of the biblical Gideon.

"And why are you still at that little church when you're richer than rich?" Phil would ask.

Robby smiled at the thought. He wouldn't have to work another day in his life, but he would be in that pulpit every Sunday. Maybe that was why God had allowed him to figure it out. The treasure wouldn't sway his heart toward temporal things.

"Blessed are the pure in heart."

He was about ten feet above the ledge now, craning his neck for a glimpse of what he knew was below. He heard a noise above and looked up and thought he saw movement. Was it an animal next to the tree? Was there a person near the rope?

"Hello?" he called, his voice echoing.

Convinced it was nothing but the wind, he leaned back to get a better look at what he'd only seen through binoculars. What

appeared from a distance to be simply a crack in the rock wall looked more like a recessed cave from this vantage point. And that sent his heart racing faster.

The rope dangled beneath him. He had plenty to get to the ledge. But looking down had caused fear to creep in, and immediately he thought of the verse in Romans about doubt, the one that said what wasn't done in faith was sin. Robby smiled. He was just like old man Quidley. He had a verse for everything.

It was at this moment that another thought swept over him. If the treasure was here—and he fully believed that—how had a crotchety old guy made this climb? No way he could've done that alone. Who had helped him? Who had he trusted with that knowledge?

Robby pushed away the questions as he pushed his feet from the wall to make his final descent. However, when he did that, the rock he'd planted his feet on dislodged and Robby pitched forward. Instinctively he reached out a hand to steady himself on the smooth surface, forgetting in that moment that he wasn't strong enough to hold on to the rope with only one hand.

And as instinctively as he reached out a hand, Robby yelped a prayer before he fell.