



*June Bug*



CHRIS FABRY



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## PRAISE FOR CHRIS FABRY

“Anne Lamott said that good writing is about telling the truth. Chris Fabry has done this. Beautifully. *June Bug* is masterful. An honest story that lingered long after I turned the last page.”

CHARLES MARTIN, Christy Award–winning author of  
*Where the River Ends*

“From the moment I read the first chapter, I couldn’t put this book down. A story carved out of real-life dynamics, *June Bug* captures the heart. I highly recommend it.”

GARY CHAPMAN, PhD, author of *The Five Love Languages*

“In *June Bug*, Chris Fabry weaves his talent as a storyteller and his heart for the suffering people of this world into a well-told tale of sacrifice and healing, sorrow and hope, and what happens when we remain faithful to those we love. Well-written and bursting with life.”

LISA SAMSON, Christy Award–winning author of *Quaker Summer*

“*June Bug* is a heartwarming tale and a precious reminder that God moves in mysterious ways to create families. *June Bug* is a heroine you’re not likely to forget.”

ANGELA HUNT, Christy Award–winning author of *The Note II: Taking a Chance on Love*

“An emotionally riveting novel that readers will not soon forget, *June Bug* is an endearing story to cherish. Chris Fabry stole the hearts of readers with *Dogwood* and his fans will be thrilled to know that *June Bug* does not disappoint.”

TINA ANN FORKNER, author of *Ruby Among Us*

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

*Publishers Weekly*

“Fabry has written an unusual and emotional tale with a startling twist.”

*Library Journal*

“Ultimately a story of love and forgiveness, [*Dogwood* is] . . . highly recommended.”

*CBA Retailers + Resources*

“[*Dogwood*] is a page-turner that keeps the reader guessing until the end.”

AnE Vibe

“*Dogwood* is . . . a book about deep secrets, the effort it takes to heal catastrophic hurts, and a thriller with an excellent plot climax.”

1340magbooks.com

“Chris Fabry’s debut adult novel is a mosaic of humanity, God’s grace, and the power of love. Solidly literary fiction, *Dogwood* also contains a mystery within the story that adds tension and a deepening plot. . . . Fabry is a wordsmith and quite a storyteller.”

Novel Reviews

“*Dogwood* will captivate you from cover to cover.”

Readerviews.com

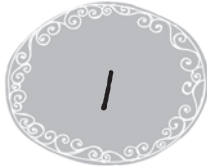
*To Erin, Megan, Shannon,  
Kristen, and Kaitlyn.  
My June Bugs.*





*PART ONE*





Some people know every little thing about themselves, like how much they weighed when they were born and how long they were from head to toe and which hospital their mama gave birth to them in and stuff like that. I've heard that some people even have a black footprint on a pink sheet of paper they keep in a baby box. The only box I have is a small suitcase that snaps shut where I keep my underwear in so only I can see it.

My dad says there's a lot of things people don't need and that their houses get cluttered with it and they store it in basements that flood and get ruined, so it's better to live simple and do what you want rather than get tied down to a mortgage—whatever that is. I guess that's why we live in an RV. Some people say "live out of," but I don't see how you can live out of something when you're living inside it and that's what we do. Daddy sleeps on the bed by the big window in the back, and I sleep in the one over the driver's seat. You have to remember not to sit up real quick in the morning or you'll have a headache all day, but it's nice having your own room.

I believed everything my daddy told me until I walked into Walmart and saw my picture on a poster over by the place where the guy with the blue vest stands. He had clear tubes going into his nose, and a hiss of air came out every time he said, "Welcome to Walmart."

My eyes were glued to that picture. I didn't hear much of anything except the lady arguing with the woman at the first register

over a return of some blanket the lady swore she bought there. The Walmart lady's voice was getting all trembly. She said there was nothing she could do about it, which made the customer woman so mad she started cussing and calling the woman behind the counter names that probably made people blush.

The old saying is that the customer is always right, but I think it's more like the customer is as mean as a snake sometimes. I've seen them come through the line and stuff a bunch of things under their carts where the cashier won't see it and leave without paying. Big old juice boxes and those frozen peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Those look good but Daddy says if you have to freeze your peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, then something has gone wrong with the world, and I think he's right. He says it's a sin to be mean to workers at Walmart because they let us use their parking lot. He also says that when they start putting vitamins and minerals in Diet Coke the Apocalypse is not far behind. I don't know what the Apocalypse is, but I wouldn't be surprised if he was right about that too.

You can't know the feeling of seeing your picture on a wall inside a store unless it has happened to you, and I have to believe I am in a small group of people on the planet. It was all I could do to just suck in a little air and keep my heart beating because I swear I could feel it slow down to almost nothing. Daddy says a hummingbird's heart beats something like a million times a minute. I was the opposite of a hummingbird, standing there with my eyes glued to that picture. Some people going outside had to walk around me to the Exit doors, but I couldn't move. I probably looked strange—just a girl staring at the Picture Them Home shots with an ache or emptiness down deep that I can't tell anybody about. It's like trying to tell people what it feels like to have your finger smashed in a grocery cart outside when it's cold. It doesn't do any good to tell things like that. Nobody would listen anyway because they're in a hurry to get back to their houses with all the stuff in them and the mortgage to pay, I guess.

The photo wasn't exactly me. It was "like" me, almost like



I was looking in a mirror. On the left was a real picture of me from when I was little. I'd never seen a picture like that because my dad says he doesn't have any of them. I've gone through his stuff, and unless he's got a really good hiding place, he's telling the truth. On the right side was the picture of what I would look like now, which was pretty close to the real me. The computer makes your face fuzzy around the nose and the eyes, but there was no mistake in my mind that I was looking at the same face I see every morning in the rearview.

The girl's name was Natalie Anne Edwards, and I rolled it around in my head as the people wheeled their carts past me to get to the Raisin Bran that was two for four dollars in the first aisle by the pharmacy. I'd seen it for less, so I couldn't see the big deal.

## MISSING CHILD

### Natalie Anne Edwards

*DOB: JUNE 20, 2000*

*AGE NOW: 9*

*MISSING DATE: JUNE 16, 2002*

*SEX: FEMALE*

*ESTIMATED HEIGHT: 4'3" (130 CM)*

*ESTIMATED WEIGHT: 80 LBS (36 KG)*

*EYES: BLUE*

*HAIR: RED*

*RACE: WHITE*

*MISSING FROM: DOGWOOD, WV*

*UNITED STATES*

*Natalie's photo is shown age progressed to 9 years. She is missing from*

*Dogwood, West Virginia. She has a dark birthmark on her left cheek.*

*She was taken on June 16, 2002, by an unknown abductor.*

I felt my left cheek and the birthmark there. Daddy says it looks a little like some guy named Nixon who was president a long time ago, but I try not to look at it except when I'm in the bathroom or when I have my mirror out in bed and I'm using my flashlight. I've always wondered if the mark was the one thing my mother gave me or if there was anything she cared to give me at all. Daddy doesn't

talk much about her unless I get to nagging him, and then he'll say something like, "She was a good woman," and leave it at that. I'll poke around a little more until he tells me to stop it. He says not to pick at things or they'll never get better, but some scabs call out to you every day.

I kept staring at the picture and my name, the door opening and closing behind me and a train whistle sounding in the distance, which I think is one of the loneliest sounds in the world, especially at night with the crickets chirping. My dad says he loves to go to sleep to the sound of a train whistle because it reminds him of his childhood.

The guy with the tubes in his nose came up behind me. "You all right, little girl?"

It kind of scared me—not as much as having to go over a bridge but pretty close. I don't know what it is about bridges. Maybe it's that I'm afraid the thing is going to collapse. I'm not really scared of the water because my dad taught me to swim early on. There's just something about bridges that makes me quiver inside, and that's why Daddy told me to always crawl up in my bed and sing "I'll Fly Away," which is probably my favorite song. He tries to warn me in advance of big rivers like the Mississippi when we're about to cross them or he'll get an earful of screams.

I nodded to the man with the tubes and left, but I couldn't help glancing back at myself. I walked into the bathroom and sat in the stall awhile and listened to the speakers and the tinny music. Then I thought, *The paper says my birthday is June 20, but Daddy says it's April 9. Maybe it's not really me.*

When I went back out and looked again, there was no doubt in my mind. That was me up there behind the glass. And I couldn't figure out a good way to ask Daddy why he had lied to me or why he called me June Bug instead of Natalie Anne. In the books I read and the movies I've seen on DVD—back when we had a player that worked—there's always somebody at the end who comes out and says, "I love you" and makes everything all right. I

wonder if that'll ever happen to me. I guess there's a lot of people who want somebody to tell them, "I love you."

I wandered to electronics and the last aisle where they have stereos and headsets and stuff. I wasn't searching for anything in particular, just piddling around, trying to get that picture out of my head.

Three girls ran back to the same aisle and pawed through the flip-flops.

"This is going to be so much fun!" a girl with two gold rings on her fingers said. "I think Mom will let me sleep over at your house tonight."

"Can't," the one with long brown hair said. "I've got swim practice early in the morning."

"You can sleep over at my house," the third one said almost in a whine, like she was pleading for something she knew she wouldn't get. She wore glasses and weighed about as much as a postage stamp. "I don't have to do anything tomorrow."

Gold Rings ignored her and pulled out a pair of pink shoes with green and yellow circles. The price said \$13.96. "These will be perfect—don't you think?"

"Mom said to find ones that are cheap and plain so we can decorate them," Brown Hair said.

"What about tomorrow night?" Gold Rings said. "We could rent a movie and sleep over at my house. You don't have swim practice Thursday, do you?"

They talked and giggled and moved on down the aisle, and I wondered what it would be like to have a friend ask you to sleep over. Or just to have a friend. Living on the road in a rolling bedroom has its advantages, but it also has its drawbacks, like never knowing where you're going to be from one day to the next. Except when your RV breaks down and you can't find the right part for it, which is why we've been at this same Walmart a long time.

"You still here, girl?" someone said behind me.

I turned to see the lady with the blue vest and a badge that

said *Assistant Manager*. The three girls must have picked up their flip-flops and run because when I looked back around they were gone. The lady's hair was blonde, a little too blonde, but she had a pretty face that made me think she might have won some beauty contest in high school. Her khaki pants were a little tight, and she wore white shoes that didn't make any noise at all when she walked across the waxed floor, which was perfect when she wanted to sneak up on three girls messing with the flip-flops.

"Did your dad get that part he was looking for?" she said, bending down.

"No, ma'am, not yet." There was almost something kind in her eyes, like I could trust her with some deep, dark secret if I had one. Then I remembered I did have one, but I wasn't about to tell the first person I talked to about my picture.

"It must be hard being away from your family. Where's your mama?"

"I don't have one."

She turned her head a little. "You mean she passed?"

I shrugged. "I just don't have one."

"Everyone has a mama. It's a fact of life." She sat on a stool used when you try on the shoes and I saw myself in the mirror at the bottom. I couldn't help thinking about the picture at the front of the store and that the face belonged to someone named Natalie Anne.

"Are you two on a trip? Must be exciting traveling in that RV. I've always wanted to take off and leave my troubles behind."

When I didn't say anything, she looked at the floor and I could see the dark roots. She smelled pretty, like a field of flowers in spring. And her fingernails were long and the tips white.

She touched a finger to an eye and tried to get at something that seemed to be bothering her. "My manager is a good man, but he can get cranky about things. He mentioned your RV and said it would need to be moved soon."

"But Daddy said you'd let us park as long as we needed."

She nodded. “Now don’t worry. This is all going to work out. Just tell your dad to come in and talk with me, okay? The corporate policy is to let people . . .”

I didn’t know what a corporate policy was, and I was already torn up about finding out my new name, so I didn’t pay much attention to the rest of what she had to say. Then she looked at me with big brown eyes that I thought would be nice to say good night to, and I noticed she didn’t wear a wedding ring. I didn’t used to notice things like that, but life can change you.

“Maybe you could come out and talk to him,” I said.

She smiled and then looked away. “What did you have for supper tonight?”

“We didn’t really have anything. He gave me a few dollars to get Subway, but I’m tired of those.”

She touched my arm. “It’ll be all right. Don’t you worry. My name’s Sheila. What’s yours?”

“June Bug,” I said. For the first time in my life I knew I was lying about my name.



Johnson stared at the sun through the rear window. Pollen from the pine trees and dirt from a morning rain streaked it yellow and brown in a haphazard design. Three Mexicans climbed out of a Ford. Tools piled in the back of the truck and compost and some black tarp. One slapped another on the back and dust flew up. Another knocked the guy’s hat off and they laughed.

The sun was at the trees on the top of the nearby mountain, then in them, and going down fast. An orange glow settled in and Johnson’s stomach growled. He glanced across the parking lot at the neon liquor store sign next to the Checker Auto Parts, and his throat parched.

A newer RV, a Monaco Camelot, had parked at the end of the lot, and the owner pulled a shade at the front windshield for privacy. He wondered what driving one of those would be like. How

much mileage it would get per gallon. The smooth ride on the road. Almost looked like a rolling hotel.

He sat up and looked out the front of the RV. The way they were parked gave him a good view of the store's entrance. An old guy with an oxygen tank pushed two carts inside. The man smiled and greeted a mom and her children.

Johnson hit the down arrow on his laptop. One green light on the wireless network from the coffee shop. He wished he had parked closer to the end of the lot, but he hadn't planned on getting stuck here.

A loud knock at the door, like he'd just run over someone's dog and it was under the back tire yelping. Johnson moved slowly, but he was agile in his bare feet. He caught a glimpse of the guy in the right mirror. Blue vest. Portly. Maybe thirty but not much older. Probably got the job through someone he knew. Johnson opened the door and nodded at the man.

"Just wondering how long you're thinking of staying," the man said. There was an edge to his voice, like he was nervous about something.

Johnson stepped down onto the asphalt that was still warm from the sun but not unbearable. "Like I said, I'm waiting on a part. If I could get out of here, believe me, I'd be long gone."

The man looked at the ground. "Well, you'll have to move on. It's been —"

"Three weeks."

"—three weeks and it could be three more before whatever part you're looking for comes, so I think it's best you move on."

"And how do you want me to move it? Push it to the interstate?"

"I can call a tow truck."

Johnson looked away. Boy Scouts at the Entrance sign were selling lightbulbs. Pink and orange clouds had turned blue, like something was roiling on the other side of the mountain. A black-and-white police car pulled into the parking lot and passed them. The man in the vest waved and the officer returned it.

"I'll give you one more night," the manager said. "If you're not out of here by morning, I'm calling the towing company."

Johnson wanted to say something more, but he just pursed his lips and nodded and watched the man waddle, pigeon-toed, back to the store.

The girl came out and passed the manager, smiling and swinging a blue bag. She had a new spiral notebook inside. She'd filled more of those things than he could count, and it didn't look like she was slowing down.

"Did you get your work done?" she said as she bounded in and tossed the bag on her bed.

Johnson opened the fridge and took out a warm can of Dr Pepper. "Enough."

"What did the manager guy want?"

"He said we'd won a shopping spree."

"He did not."

Johnson took a long pull from the can and belched. "He was just wondering how long we'd be here."

"I met a friend," the girl said, her face shining. "She's really nice. And pretty. And I don't think she's married. And she has the most beautiful eyes."

"June Bug, the last thing we need is somebody with her eyes on this treasure." He spread his arms out in the RV. "What woman could resist this castle?"

"She's not after your treasure. She just cares about us. She said the manager guy was getting upset that we've been here so long. Is that what he told you?"

"Nah, this is a big parking lot. We're gonna be fine. Did you get something to eat?"

June Bug shook her head and climbed up to her bed. "Almost finished with my last journal. I want to start a new one tonight."

"What do you put in those things? What kind of stuff do you write down?"

"I don't know. Just things that seem important. Places we've been. It's sort of like talking to a friend who won't tell your secrets."

“What kind of secrets?”

She slipped off her plastic shoes and let them fall to the floor, then opened the bag and took out a dark green notebook. “When you tell me what you’re writing about on that computer, I’ll tell you what’s in my notebooks.”

Johnson smiled and took another drink from the can, then tossed it in the trash.

At the storefront, the police car had stopped and the manager leaned over the open window.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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And thanks to Andrea, my wife, who has been through the desert with the kids and me. Your love and encouragement are like a cool drink of reverse osmosis water to a tired soul.

## *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

Chris Fabry is a 1982 graduate of the W. Page Pitt School of Journalism at Marshall University and a native of West Virginia. He is heard on Moody Radio's *Chris Fabry Live!*, *Love Worth Finding*, and *Building Relationships* with Dr. Gary Chapman. He and his wife, Andrea, are the parents of nine children. You can visit his Web site at [www.chrisfabry.com](http://www.chrisfabry.com).