

A woman and a young girl are shown from the chest up, looking out over a vast, green landscape under a soft, golden light. The woman is on the right, her back to the camera, wearing a white t-shirt and a thin necklace. The girl is on the left, wearing a textured, light-colored sweater. They are standing on a balcony with a wooden railing. The background shows rolling hills and a bright sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

LOOKING

*There is no greater power on earth*

INTO

*than a mother's love,*

YOU

*unless it's a mother's fear*

CHRIS FABRY

## Praise for Chris Fabry

### *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

### *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

*Looking into You*

## Other Novels by Chris Fabry

*Dogwood*

*June Bug*

*Almost Heaven*

*Not in the Heart*

*Borders of the Heart*

*Every Waking Moment*

*The Promise of Jesse Woods*

*Under a Cloudless Sky*

*A Marriage Carol*

(with Dr. Gary Chapman)

*War Room*

(based on the motion picture  
by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick)

*The Song*

(based on the screenplay by Richard L. Ramsay)

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CHRIS FABRY



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*Looking into You*

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# Prologue



*There is no greater power on earth than a mother's love.*

I'd been staring at the words on the screen, at the blinking cursor following them like a tapping foot, for what felt like hours when I heard familiar voices outside my office in the English department of Millhaven College.

"Think about it. Her mother is out there somewhere." Ginny Baylor, an economics professor.

"It's haunting," the second voice agreed. Madalyn Palmer, from admissions.

I opened my door.

"I thought you were on sabbatical," Madalyn said when she saw me. "Off in the mountains or to a beach house near your parents."

"Just getting a change of scenery," I said. "Get the juices flowing."

"How's the writing going?" Ginny said, a little too much concern on her face. "Any progress?"

"I suppose it depends on how you define *progress*."

They smiled at me, though it felt more sad than reassuring. Like they could tell I was no further along with my dissertation than when I'd begun my sabbatical.

“What were you talking about?” I said.

The elevator opened and Ginny excused herself. Something about a dinner appointment. Madalyn inched closer.

“We saw a documentary last night that is the most heart-breaking thing. And you know how picky I am about films.”

I nodded. “What film?”

She told me the title, the art theater where it was playing, and I catalogued the information. Then in rapid fire, she summarized a film that began as the story of residents in a nursing home but gradually shifted focus to a remarkable girl who worked with them. A girl adopted at birth and then abandoned, who passed through the system of child protective services like water through a drain. A girl with an extraordinary gift for connecting to those whose minds were seemingly beyond reach. A girl who had been deeply damaged by choices made before her birth. My heart beat faster and catching breath was a struggle.

“Paige, you have to see it,” Madalyn said. “It’s all I’ve been able to think about.”

“It sounds good,” I said, choking a little.

Madalyn shook her head again as if she couldn’t get the lingering images from her mind. As she stepped into the elevator, I asked the question that had floated to the surface of my heart.

“Do they mention her name?” I said. “The girl in the film?”

“Yes. You never see her face. They blur it for anonymity, I guess. They just show her eyes. They have this movement—they call it something; I can’t remember. But her name is Treha. Isn’t that exotic?”

“Yes,” I managed.

I limped back to the office and closed the door and leaned hard against it, sliding to the floor. No overwhelming emotion

gripped me. I simply struggled to breathe. My eyes fell on a set of books. My greatest treasures. The stories that made my heart come alive.

I crawled on all fours to the desk and pulled myself up into the wooden chair. Ten minutes earlier I had thought my biggest problem was my dissertation. The working title was “The Strength of a Mother’s Love: A Literary Epistemology.” The last words I’d written still hung on the screen: *There is no greater power on earth than a mother’s love.*

“Unless it’s a mother’s fear,” I whispered.

I found the trailer online and watched it. I read reviews. I searched for another explanation, a plausible denial, some excuse. And finally I bought a ticket and slipped into the back row of the theater to watch a film about my daughter.



## CHAPTER I

### Miriam

Exiting the dorm elevator, her arms loaded down with plastic bags, Miriam Howard froze at the sound of the raised voice coming from the RA's room.

"I don't mind rooming with a freshman. I don't mind not getting my requested roommate. But I draw the line at rooming with a freak!"

"Shelly, she's not a freak. Don't talk that way. She's not even a freshman."

The door closed but Miriam could still hear them.

"She has the personality of an end table, Jill. She won't look at me when I speak to her. It's like talking to a houseplant."

"You've wanted a room to yourself," Jill said. "Think of it that way. You won't have to make small talk."

Miriam closed her eyes. She liked the RA, Jill, but she could tell whoever made room assignments hadn't fully comprehended Treh's situation. Back in the spring Miriam had flown to Tennessee with Treh and met with the dean of admissions to describe the special circumstances. She'd gone on a tour of the Bethesda campus and the dormitory. Treh, she was told, would

be nurtured and helped to become all she could be. And under no circumstances would the faculty or administration exploit Treha's semicelebrity status. In fact, only a few on campus had even seen the documentary that featured her story. Treha's secret was safe.

Would Treha be safe, though? That was the question that drew Miriam to the girl when she had first met her. She had hired Treha at Desert Gardens because the girl seemed so vulnerable and yet so competent with the older residents. As Treha's story had unfolded, Miriam had grown more attached to her and had taken on a motherly role that had brought her all the way to Tennessee to help Treha in her next steps.

Earlier today, when they'd flown in from Tucson, Miriam had returned from the Enterprise rental counter to find Treha standing at the start of the baggage claim carousel, alone and inconspicuous. She'd studied the girl, trying to see her through a stranger's eyes. Treha had certainly made progress with . . . What would she call it? Her condition? Her disability? The medication prescribed along with the exercise and diet had helped the girl lose weight. Her nystagmus, an involuntary eye movement, had improved, and those who didn't look closely wouldn't notice.

Still, there was no question that Treha was different. Miriam hated the word. It was a category, a way of pigeonholing. *Different* meant "challenged" or "special." None of the words came close to describing Treha and what she faced in life or in attending college alone.

She walked to the RA's door and stood there, listening, about to knock, when something rose up inside. Something that told her to turn and leave, to let them work it out. This was no longer her job. A bird must flap its wings in the wind alone.

Miriam took the bags to Treha's room. "All right, I got some tissues and a few pieces of silverware in case you want a snack in your room and—" she shook out the pillowcase—"you'll want to wash this before you sleep on it. You remember where the laundry is, right?"

Treha nodded. She was on the corner of her bed wearing her scrubs, preferring them to jeans—another of the girl's quirks. "I don't think my roommate likes me."

Miriam kept unloading the bags. "Well, she doesn't know you yet."

Treha held a folded piece of paper, turning it over and over.

"What do you have there?" Miriam said, sitting beside her.

"I found it as I was unpacking."

She handed her the note and Miriam recognized her husband's scrawl. She tried to act casual about it as if she'd read the words before, but she really handed it back because her eyes were too blurry. Just the thought of Charlie taking this step moved her. But right now everything moved her. The girl had awakened something in him, too.

"They don't make them like Charlie anymore, do they?" Treha said.

Miriam laughed. "No, they sure don't. Charlie opened up a little sliver of his heart for you. I think you're in there forever."

Treha folded the note and put it back in her suitcase and zipped the flap. The suitcase was gigantic—a gift from one of the Desert Gardens residents, Elsie Pratt. The old woman had taken Treha under her wing and been the one to recommend that Treha attend Bethesda, her alma mater. With the savings Elsie had left, she could afford to send Treha to the school for at least a year. Miriam and Charlie had matched her commitment, and with the year Treha had from the community college . . .

Well, they would cross the senior year bridge when they came to it. The lawsuit against the company responsible for Treha's condition had paid for her treatment, but in a cruel twist, Treha had received nothing else.

There was so much unfairness in the girl's life. So much loss. She had no idea who or where her mother was. She had been tossed about on the sea of the foster care system and hadn't been able to walk on water. Now Miriam was losing control over who would interact with her, who might say something cutting or mean.

Deep breath. Lines rehearsed. Miriam wiped her eyes and set her jaw.

"All right, you have my number. Anything you need, anytime you have a question, or if you just want to talk, you know how to reach me. And you have Charlie's e-mail."

Treha fidgeted with the hem of her scrubs top. In one motion she turned and hugged Miriam, burying her head in the woman's chest, and Miriam thought her heart would burst.

She leaned back and took Treha's face in her hands. "Treha, I'm going to be honest. I don't want you to go to this school or any other. I want you to stay with us at Desert Gardens. I want you to live with Charlie and me. I'd like to keep you for myself, let you keep going to the community college. But somehow that doesn't seem fair. To you or the rest of the world."

Treha nodded.

"It's not going to be easy to fit in here and find your place. Finding a friend might be hard. But just because it's hard doesn't mean it can't be done. You know that."

Miriam picked up her purse and checked the room once more. Her work was done. Or maybe it was just beginning. This was every parent's nightmare and worst fear, turning to

leave and not looking back. She wasn't Treha's mother. She hadn't raised her. Treha hadn't been in her life long enough for it to hurt this much.

She turned back to Treha. "When your head hits the pillow every night, know that there are two old dogs in Arizona praying for you, a couple of hours behind you. And when you wake up every morning, you pray for us. We're going to need it. Okay?"

Miriam kissed Treha on the forehead and walked out of the room, willing herself not to turn again.