



SUMMER
READING
SERIAL



by Chris Martin,
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CHAPTER SIX

Reunited



After being separated from his friends at the park and then captured, Bobby wondered if things would ever return to normal. Amy's assistance in helping him escape ignited a glimmer of hope that he would not lose sight of.

He regretted not having more time on the phone with Luke to explain the situation. When the men had started kicking in the door, Bobby and Amy bolted for the window exit that led to the fire escape.

They reached the ground and ran. Three blocks later, they ducked into a fast food restaurant to hide. Bobby guided them to a booth in the back by the restrooms. There, they could keep an eye on both entrances.

"Bobby, what's this all about? Why did those people kidnap you?"

"We found a cell phone in the park," Bobby explained. "Some guy yelled at us so we ran. He came after me first because he thought I had it, but I had already handed the phone to Ethan."

"Why do they want the phone so bad?"

"I assume there must be a file, picture or maybe a video on there they don't want anyone to see. I don't know."

"I guess they weren't too happy when they realized you didn't have it."

"Not one little bit."

"Why don't you just go to the police and tell them what's going on?" Amy asked.

Bobby shook his head. "The guy from the park, the one that chased me, I think he's a cop."

"How do you know?"

"When he pulled me out of the trunk, my blindfold was loose. I saw some kind of badge lying on the front seat."

Amy sat quietly for a couple minutes. Bobby could see the wheels churning inside her head as she processed the story. "So, how long are we planning on staying here?" she asked.

"I want to give my friends enough time to find the apartments. We'll wait a little while longer and then go see if they came looking for me."

"You really have a lot of faith in your friends, don't you?"

Bobby nodded. "I can always count on them."

Amy turned her head and mumbled something under her breath.

"What was that?" Bobby asked.

Amy looked back and for a brief second, he thought she was going to cry. "I said that must be nice."

"Why, you can't count on yours?"

"You have to have some first. Bobby, as hard as it is to imagine, I'm kind of a loner. I don't have many friends." Amy slumped down in the booth and looked out the window. "I'm not popular, I don't wear the same clothes as all the other girls, and no one invites me to the Friday night parties."

Bobby smiled. "Okay."

"Okay, what? Didn't you hear what I said? I'm a loser."

"I can relate to what you're saying. And, for the record, you're not a loser."

"Relate? You're kidding me, right? How can you possibly relate to my life?"

A man walked into the restaurant and Bobby's heart skipped a beat. At first, it looked like the man from the park, but he was mistaken. Not having his glasses was going to be rough. "I can relate because I'm different than everyone else too. You could almost call me an outsider."

Amy sat up, clearly interested. "What do you mean?"

"Kids my age are intimidated by me because I get such better grades than they do in school. They only want something to do with me if it involves finishing their homework. I learned a long time ago that people are afraid of what they can't understand."

"Exactly, just because I'm different doesn't mean I'm some kind of freak. Why can't people get that?"

Bobby shrugged. "I don't know. It's stupid." He checked his watch. Almost thirty minutes had passed. "So, will your parents be wondering where you are this late at night?"

Amy shook her head. "Nah. Dad has a poker game tonight. He won't be home until at least three in the morning."

"Your mom?"

"She bailed on us three years ago right after I turned ten. I don't know where she is."

"Oh, jeez," Bobby said. "I'm sorry for being so nosey."

"No need to apologize. You didn't know." Amy smiled, but the sadness in her eyes reflected the pain and abandonment that anyone would feel in that situation.

Bobby wanted to stay and talk to her for hours, but he knew they needed to leave. He vowed to himself that once everything was over, they would sit down and get to know each other better. "We should get back and see if they showed up." He stood up and took her hand. "Come on."

They left and walked back to the apartments. When they reached the parking lot, Bobby saw the truck. "They're here!"

As they approached the vehicle, Boone stood up in the back and let out a bark. Amy jumped in surprise but Bobby just laughed. "Hey, Boone. Good boy." He dropped the tailgate and the retriever tried to greet him by licking his face. Bobby pulled back. "Hey, now. How about just a handshake or something?"

Amy moved in closer. "Whose dog?"

"Luke's. Amy, this is Boone. Boone, meet Amy."

She held out her hand for the dog to sniff and decide if he approved. Licking and tail wagging followed, indicating Boone liked her. She smiled. "Good boy."

Bobby looked around. "I bet they're inside looking for us. You think those men are still in your apartment?"

"Probably. Sounds like they either need you or the cell phone. I doubt they ran off to grab a bite to eat."

Bobby smiled. He couldn't wait to see her and Ethan in a battle of words. A gentle breeze tickled his cheek and brought with it the aroma of a nearby steak house. The smell nearly buckled his knees. It felt like days since he'd eaten anything. "Wonder how long Luke's been here?"

Amy shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know but we're not going to find out by standing here in the parking lot. Let's get in there and see what's going on."

Bobby smiled at her confidence. On the outside she appeared confident and fearless, but he believed there was a scared little girl hiding somewhere inside. He knew they were going to be great friends. "You're right, let's go."

They left Boone in the truck and crossed the parking lot to the main entrance of the apartments. Bobby shivered as they walked through the door. His stomach churned with an uneasiness that couldn't be tamed. Everything inside commanded him to turn around and go in the opposite direction, but he knew what needed to be done.

He might have bolted if Amy hadn't been at his side. As if sensing his thoughts, she touched his arm and gave him a smile of encouragement. The tension in his belly eased off slightly, but didn't completely vanish.

"Should we just go floor by floor?" he asked.

Amy nodded. "Sounds good to me. Let's do this." She pointed.

"We can go that way and take the stairs."

They started toward the other end of the hall, passing by the darkened office. Bobby stopped and grabbed her arm. "Wait! Is there a computer in that office?"

"Yeah, I think so. There might be a laptop, why?"

"Hopefully Ethan brought the phone with him. If he did, I can use a laptop to figure out what's on it."

Amy pulled out her keys and tried several until the lock finally clicked. She opened the door and they both went in. As Amy had guessed, a laptop sat on the desk. Bobby grabbed it and stepped back into the hallway.

As Amy locked the door, Bobby turned and noticed someone walking toward them. He nearly fainted from fright, but suddenly realized the man was not a stranger. It was Luke's dad. "Mr. Farmer!"

"Bobby! You're okay." He ran up and grabbed him in a bear hug.

Bobby's face turned three different shades of red. "Yeah, I'm fine. Where are Luke and Ethan?"

"We split up on different floors looking for you. I'm glad you're okay. Who's your friend?"

"Mr. Farmer, this is Amy. She helped me escape. Amy, this is Luke's dad."

As they shook hands, Mr. Farmer smiled. "Very nice to meet you, young lady. From the looks of things, we owe you a very big thank you."

Blushing, Amy looked to her feet. "It's no big deal. I was in the right place at the right time."

Bobby shook his head in disagreement. "Trust me, it was much more than that." He knew without a doubt she had saved him from something horrible. He shuddered at the thought of what could have happened. He looked at Mr. Farmer. "Did you guys bring the cell phone?"

"Ethan has it," replied Mr. Farmer. "He insisted on bringing it. Why?"

"I can find out what's on it by using this laptop. I just need some time. Amy lives in 203, but we figured they are probably waiting there for us to come back."

Amy held up the keys. "There are a couple apartments on this floor that aren't rented out. We could use one of those. How much time do you need?"

Bobby shrugged. "Not sure. I won't know until I get into it. Which ones are empty?"

"I believe 110 is empty."

"Sweet, here take this." Bobby handed the laptop to Amy. "Go wait for us there."

"What?"

"I'm going to go with Mr. Farmer to round up Luke and Ethan. Once we find them, we'll meet you in 110 so I can see what's on the phone."

"Okay." She took the laptop. "Be careful."

Bobby smiled. He could get lost in her eyes. He couldn't wait until this was over so they could just go somewhere and talk. There were so many things he wanted to know about her. "I will. See you in a few."

He watched her walk down the hall and disappear into the apartment. He turned to Mr. Farmer. "Alright, where do we start?"

"Luke's on the second floor and Ethan the third. We were supposed to meet on the third floor once we were done, so let's see if they are there waiting."

Bobby nodded in agreement. He followed Mr. Farmer up the stairs, his heart beating wildly. They were so close to figuring out what was so important on the cell phone, the source of their perilous night. He couldn't wait to see Luke and Ethan. It felt like months instead of just hours since he had last seen either of them.

They reached the second floor landing and Mr. Farmer stopped, put up his hand and motioned for silence. Bobby listened intently and heard the faint sound of voices from above them somewhere. It sounded like people whispering.

Bobby pressed his back against the wall as Mr. Farmer tried to look upward without giving away his position in the shadows under the stairs. Bobby couldn't tell what was being said, although the tone of the whispers sounded urgent.

Mr. Farmer looked at him with concern. Bobby quietly moved closer. "See anything?" he whispered.

Luke's father shook his head.

Without warning, Bobby felt a tickle in his nose and he knew it would be impossible to hold it back. He clasped a hand over his face, but the sneeze escaped. The sound reverberated off the walls louder than an exploding grenade.

Bobby watched the color drain from Mr. Farmer's face and could only imagine the look of horror on his own. There was an expectant silence as the whispering above them stopped abruptly. The next thing they heard was the sound of people rushing down the stairs toward them.

"Go!" Luke's dad grabbed Bobby by the arm and pushed him toward the exit door. Someone called out.

"Dad?"

Bobby stopped and turned around. Luke stood there, Ethan right behind him.

COMING NEXT WEEK:

CHAPTER SEVEN

Secrets and Betrayal

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