



SUMMER
READING
SERIAL



by Chris Martin,
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CHAPTER THREE **The Police Visit**



Ethan's stared in surprise. "A cop? Are you kidding me?" Luke shook his head. "I wish I was, man. What are we going to do?"

Ethan peered in the window to see with his own eyes. The boys had run for their lives trying to avoid the very man standing in Luke's living room. Boone sat beside his new master and nuzzled his hand, begging for attention.

"It's okay, boy. We'll figure this out." Luke spoke the words, but didn't mean them. His mind churned with confusion as he pet the dog. "You think both of them are bad?"

"Bad? What makes you think either of them is bad?"

Luke made a weird face. "Well, um, he kind of chased us when he realized we had the cell phone. Duh."

"What if the undercover cop in there was trying to get the cell phone, but not hurt us? We don't know for sure they took Bobby. They could be looking for the same dude that almost ran over us down the street."

"He was calling the number trying to find the phone. How would he know what the number was?"

"Good point."

"And why didn't he yell out to us that he was with the police or something? Aren't they supposed to do that?"

Ethan shrugged. "That's how they do it on TV, but who knows. Until we can get some proof, I guess we can't really trust anyone."

"Proof? What kind of proof?"

"We need something that will tell us if the police are involved with crazy driver man or trying to put him away."

"And exactly how are we going to get that?"

Ethan moved away from the window. "I don't know. I can't tell what's going on in there. Obviously, we can't just stroll in like everything is cool. We need to come up with a plan."

"If we can't trust the police, who the heck can we trust? I would really like to know why that stupid cell phone is so important."

Ethan remained quiet, staring out to the street.

Luke grew concerned. "Dude, what's wrong?"

"If these guys are involved, I wonder if they have Bobby tied up in one of the cars. We need to check before they leave."

"We're dead meat if they catch us."

"They won't. You're going to go in while I search both cars. Keep them occupied until I figure out if Bobby's here or not. It shouldn't take long."

Luke jumped to his feet. "What? Are you crazy? That will never work."

"You have a better plan, dog lover? We've got to make sure Bobby's okay. If he's in one of those cars, I'm going to get him out." Luke shook his head.

Ethan put up his hand to stop any objections. "Look, it's all we've got. Just make sure you stall them long enough to give me time." He started toward the street.

"Wait! Ethan?" He didn't stop. Luke groaned and walked around the house to the front door. He stood there gathering his thoughts and desperately trying to come up with a convincing story to feed his parents.

Boone looked up expectantly. "Well, boy. Here goes nothing." Luke opened the door and entered his house. He turned back to the retriever. "Stay." He would drop that bombshell on his folks after he let them know he was alright.

He couldn't think of anything to explain why he was so late. He had never been good at making up stories. His parents had taught him to be honest a little too well. He couldn't even lie to his mother about doing his homework. She would take one look at his face and know whether or not

he was telling the truth.

Ethan, on the other hand, was a master at weaving tales so absurd and farfetched that they came across as genuine. He had an excuse for any situation. And if the circumstance required a completely new story, he could make one up on the spot.

Luke wondered why he wasn't out there searching the cars while Mr. Storyteller dazzled his parents and the police with a fable so spine tingling, they would all forget the boys had come home after dark. He shook his head. Anxiety churned in his stomach with a reckless fury.

"Luke?"

He looked up and saw the worried face of his mother.

"Luke!" She rushed down the hall and grabbed him with both arms, nearly choking off his air supply.

"Mom, I'm fine. Mom, come on. I can't breathe."

She finally released her death grip. "Where on earth have you been, young man? We have been worried sick that something happened to you." Whenever she used his given name, things weren't usually as bad as he imagined in his head. When she ended a sentence with young man, Luke knew he was in some serious trouble.

"We were at the park. I told you I was going over there with the guys."

"You were supposed to be back hours ago. Your father and I called the police thinking you had been kidnapped."

"Kidnapped? Are you serious?"

"Very serious. You're never home this late. What were you doing?"

"We were at the park and-"

"Luke!" Mr. Farmer walked down the hall and gave Luke a hug. Not quite the bone crushing squeeze he had earned from his mom, but a firm one nonetheless. "Where have you been, Son?"

For several horrifying seconds, Luke's mind went completely blank. He was finding it hard to even remember his own name. He wondered what they would do if he just yelled real loud and rushed upstairs to his room. He doubted that would go over too well.

"We were at the park and Bobby found this cell phone and he got a call on it but he didn't say anything and then this guy started chasing us and we all ran in different directions-"

Luke's dad put up his hands. "Whoa, Son. Slow down. Reign in the runaway horses. You're talking so fast it sounds like a different language. Now, slow down and tell us what happened."

Luke started to repeat what he had said, but closed his mouth when the officers approached.

"Mr. and Mrs. Farmer, I take it this is your son?" The cop in uniform stood in front of the undercover officer, and Luke couldn't see his face. He knew it was the man that had chased them from the park. He had seen him clear as day through the window.

Luke's mom spoke up. "Yes, Officer Morgan. This is Luke. I am so sorry we called you. It looks like it was just a case of ignoring his curfew. Apparently, we were worried over nothing."

"That's perfectly fine, Mrs. Farmer. It's always better to be safe than sorry. I'm glad you called us. It shows you care about your son. Some parents don't have a clue where their kids are most of the time and that's the ones who end up in trouble."

"Well, we certainly don't like wasting your time like this when I'm sure there are much more important things going on that require your attention. Thank you so much for coming. I think we'll be fine now. Just have to figure out the punishment."

Office Morgan stepped past Luke and his parents toward the door. "Trust me, it wasn't a waste of time. I don't believe there is anything more important than the safety of family members. I have two kids of my own so I understand completely."

Luke's mother smiled. "Thank you."

The officer in plain clothes started to follow Officer Morgan out the door, but he stopped and looked down at Luke. "He's right. You should feel lucky to have such caring parents. You never know what kind of bad people are out there."

Luke studied the man's eyes, but couldn't tell if the words were a threat or a simple statement. The same tension that knotted his stomach at the park had returned. There was just something wrong. He couldn't bring himself to trust the guy. "Yes, sir."

He smiled strangely and then turned to Mr. and Mrs. Farmer. "Goodnight folks."

As both policemen walked out the door, Luke suddenly remembered Ethan was searching the cars. Had he given him enough time? Panic slammed into him like the shock of being dry and diving into ice cold water. For several seconds he was afraid to even breathe.

"Do you want to see my new dog?" Luke wasn't sure why he blurted that out, but it was the only thing that popped into his mind. He didn't even want to think about what would happen if they caught Ethan near their vehicles.

"Luke?" His mother stared at him in confusion. "What are you talking about? You don't have a dog."

Luke stepped past everyone and walked out to the porch. "Boone? Come here, boy."

Boone approached from around the side of the house which Luke thought was a little strange. Why hadn't he stayed on the porch like he was told?

"Luke, whose dog is this?" his father asked.

"Well, this is Boone. He's sort of mine now. I found him in the woods out at the park. He didn't have a collar."

Office Morgan chuckled and nodded his head. "We need to be going. You folks have a good evening."

Luke's mom apologized. "Thank you, officers. Again, I am so sorry for all the trouble." She shot her son a look that could stop time. He knew the hole he had dug himself into was getting deeper by the minute. He hoped they would let him out of the house again before he graduated high school. At this rate, he would probably be grounded for life.

There was no sign of Ethan. Apparently, Luke had given him enough time to look for Bobby and then hide until the coast was clear. He let out a sigh of relief as the officers drove away and disappeared out of sight.

Luke turned toward his parents. They both stood there clearly waiting for an explanation. From the looks of things, he knew they weren't going to accept anything but the complete truth. Boone sat quietly at his feet, probably just as unsure as his new master was about what was going to happen next.

"Can I keep him?"

His dad spoke first. "Sure you can, as long as we never have to feed him."

"Come on, Dad. I'm serious. He needs a good home and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to care for him."

"We can discuss the dog later," said his mom. "I want to know what happened at the park. You started to tell us something about a phone? What was that all about?"

"Right before we were going to come home, Bobby found a cell phone. We didn't think it was a big deal until someone called and didn't say anything."

"They didn't identify themselves or ask who had their phone or anything?"

"Nope, not a word. The number was blocked too, so we had no way of calling them back. We talked about what to do with it for a little while and then it rang again. We saw a man coming our way searching the ground and figured it was the owner. He was calling the phone from another cell."

"Why didn't you just offer to give the phone back?"

"Well, I had a bad feeling about the whole thing and before we could say anything, the man yelled and started chasing us. We took off in three different directions. You're not going to believe who he was." His father frowned. "Who?"

"Officer Morgan's partner that was here just now."

"What? Come on, Luke. Surely you can make up a better story than that. If it was him, why didn't he say anything about it when you came inside the house?"

"I guess he didn't want anyone to know what was going on."

His mom stepped forward and put a hand on Luke's shoulder.

"Son, you're going to have to do better than that. I'm finding that very hard to believe."

"He's telling the truth, Mrs. Farmer." Ethan stepped out of the shadows and onto the porch. "Something's going on and I believe the police are involved."

"Ethan? Do your parents know you're back?"

"No ma'am. I haven't called them yet, but I'm not really worried about that right now. Bobby is missing. We believe he's been kidnapped because we have that cell phone. I think he's in real danger."

"How do you know he's been kidnapped?" asked Mr. Farmer.

"I found these." Ethan stepped into the glow of the porch light and held up a pair of glasses.

"They belong to Bobby," Luke whispered. "Where did you find them?"

"In the trunk of the unmarked police car that was parked here just a few minutes ago. I'm afraid if we don't find him soon, something very bad is going to happen."

COMING NEXT WEEK:
CHAPTER FOUR

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