

My Friend Bobby

Alan Edward Nourse

An abstract graphic design featuring a solid green background. Overlaid on this background are several thick, vibrant blue lines. These lines are arranged in a non-representational, geometric pattern, including straight horizontal, vertical, and diagonal segments, as well as a prominent curved arc. The lines vary in length and orientation, creating a dynamic and modern visual effect.

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My Friend Bobby

MY NAME is Jimmy and I am five years old, and my friend Bobby is five years old too but he says he thinks he's really more than five years old because he's already grown up and I'm just a little boy. We live out in the country because that's where mommy and daddy live, and every morning daddy takes the car out of the barn and rides into the city to work, and every night he comes back to eat supper and to see mommy and Bobby and me. One time I asked daddy why we don't live in the city like some people do and he laughed and said you wouldn't really want to live in the city would you? After all he said you couldn't have Bobby in the city, so I guess it's better to live in the country after all.

Anyway daddy says that the city is no place to raise kids these days. I asked Bobby if I am a kid and he said he guessed so but I don't think he really knows because Bobby isn't very smart. But Bobby is my friend even if he doesn't know much and I like him more than anybody else.

Mommy doesn't like Bobby very much and when I am bad she makes Bobby go outdoors even when it's cold outside. Mommy says I shouldn't play with Bobby so much because after all Bobby is only a dog but I like Bobby. Everyone else is so big, and when mommy and daddy are home all I can see is their legs unless I look way up high, and when I do something bad I'm scared because they're so big and strong. Bobby is strong too but he isn't any bigger than I am, and he is always nice to me. He has a long shaggy brown coat and a long pointed nose, and a nice collar of white fur and people sometimes say to daddy what a nice collie that is and daddy says yes isn't he and he takes to the boy so. I don't know what a collie is but I have fun with Bobby all the time. Sometimes he lets me ride on his back and we talk to each other and have secrets even though I don't think he is very smart. I don't know why mommy and daddy don't understand me

when I talk to them the way I talk to Bobby but maybe they just pretend they can't hear me talk that way.

I am always sorry when daddy goes to work in the morning. Daddy is nice to me most times and takes me and Bobby for walks. But mommy never takes me for walks and when we are alone she is busy and she isn't nice to me. Sometimes she says I am a bad boy and makes me stay in my room even when I haven't done anything bad and sometimes she thinks things in her head that she doesn't say to me. I don't know why mommy doesn't like me and Bobby doesn't know either, but we like it best when mommy lets us go outdoors to play in the barn or down by the creek. If I get my feet wet mommy says I am very bad so I stay on the bank and let Bobby go in, but one day when Bobby went into the water just before we went home for supper mommy scolded me and told me I was bad for letting Bobby go into the water and when I told her she hadn't told me not to let Bobby go in she was angry and I could tell that she didn't like me at all that day.

Almost every day I do something that mommy says is bad even when I try specially to be good. Sometimes right after daddy goes away in the morning I know that mommy is angry and is going to spank me sooner or later that day because she is already thinking how she will spank me, but she never says so out loud. Sometimes she pretends that she's not angry and takes me up on her lap and says I'm her nice little boy but all the time I can hear her thinking that she doesn't really like me even when she tries and she doesn't even want to touch me if she can help it. I can hear her wondering why my hair doesn't grow nice like the Bennet twins that live up the road. I don't see how mommy can be saying one thing out loud and something else inside her head at the same time but when I look at her she puts me down and says she's busy and will I get out from underfoot, and then pretty soon I do something that makes her angry and she makes me go to my room or she spansks me. Bobby doesn't like this. Once when she spanked me he growled at mommy, and mommy chased him outdoors with a broom before she sent me to bed. I cried all day that day because it was cold outdoors and I wanted to have Bobby with me.

I wonder why mommy doesn't like me?



One day I was a bad boy and let Bobby come into the house before mommy told me I could. Bobby hadn't done anything bad but mommy hit him on the back

with the broom and hurt him and chased him back outdoors and then she told me I was a very bad boy. I could tell that she was going to spank me and I knew she would hurt me because she was so big, and I ran upstairs and hid in my room. Then mommy stamped her foot hard and said Jimmy you come down here this minute. I didn't answer and then she said if I have to come upstairs and get you I'll whip you until you can't sit down, and I still didn't answer because mommy hurts me when she gets angry like that. Then I heard her coming up the stairs and into my room and she opened the closet door and found me. I said please don't hurt me mommy but she reached down and caught my ear and dragged me out of the closet. I was so scared I bit her hand and she screamed and let go and I ran and locked myself in the bathroom because I knew she would hurt me bad if I didn't. I stayed there all day long and I could hear mommy running the sweeper downstairs and I couldn't see why she wanted to hurt me so much just because I let Bobby come in before she told me I could. But somehow it seemed that mommy was afraid of me even though she was so big and strong. I don't see why anybody as big as mommy should be afraid of me but she was.

When daddy came home that night I heard him talking to mommy, and then he came up to the bathroom and said open the door Jimmy I want to talk to you. I said I want Bobby first so he went down and called Bobby and then I opened the door and came out of the bathroom. Daddy reached down and lifted me high up on his shoulder and took me into my bedroom and just sat there for a long time patting Bobby's head and I couldn't hear what he was thinking very well. Finally he said out loud Jimmy you've got to be good to your mommy and do what she says and not lock yourself up in rooms any more. I said but mommy was going to hurt me and daddy said when you're a bad boy your mommy has to punish you so you'll remember to be good, but she doesn't like to spank you. She only does it because she loves you.

I knew that wasn't true because mommy likes to punish me but I didn't dare say that to daddy. Daddy isn't afraid of me the way mommy is and he is nice to me most times, so I said all right if you say so. Daddy said fine, will you promise to be nice to mommy from now on? I said yes if mommy won't hit Bobby any more with the broom. And daddy said well after all Bobby can be a bad dog just the way you can be a bad boy, can't he? I knew Bobby was never a bad dog on purpose but I said yes I guessed so. Then I wanted to ask daddy why mommy was afraid of me but I didn't dare because I knew daddy liked mommy more than anybody and maybe he would be angry at me for saying things like that about her.

That night I heard mommy and daddy talking down in the living room and I sat on the top step so I could hear them. Bobby sat there too, but I knew he didn't know what they were saying because Bobby isn't very smart and can't understand word-talk like I can. He can only understand think-talk, and he doesn't understand that very well. But now even I couldn't understand what mommy was saying. She was crying and saying Ben I tell you there's something wrong with the child, he knows what I'm *thinking*, I can tell it by the way he looks at me. And daddy said darling, that's ridiculous, how could he possibly know what you're thinking? Mommy said I don't know but he does! Ever since he was a little boy he's known—oh, Ben, it's horrible, I can't do anything with him because he *knows* what I'm going to do before I do it. Then daddy said Carol, you're upset about today and you're making things up. The child is just a little smarter than most kids, there's nothing wrong with that. And mommy said no, there's more to it than that and I can't stand it any longer. We've got to take him to a doctor, I don't even like to look at him. Daddy said you're tired, you're just letting little things get on your nerves. So maybe the boy does look a little strange, you know the doctor said it was just that the fontanelles hadn't closed as soon as they should have and lots of children don't have a good growth of hair before they're six or seven. After all he said he isn't a *bad* looking boy.

Then mommy said that isn't true, he's horrible! I can't bear it, Ben, *please* do something, and daddy said what can I do? I talked to the boy and he was sorry and promised he'd behave himself. And mommy said then there's that dog—it follows him around wherever he goes, and he's simply wicked if the dog isn't around, and daddy said isn't it perfectly normal for a boy to love his dog? Mommy said no, not like this, talking to him all the time, and the dog acting exactly as if he understands—there's something wrong with the child, something horribly wrong.

Then daddy was quiet for a while, and then he said all right, if it will make you feel any better we can have Doctor Grant take another look at him. Maybe he can convince you that there's nothing wrong with the boy, and mommy said please, Ben, anything, I can't stand much more of this.

When I went back to bed and Bobby curled up on the floor, I asked him what were fontanelles, and Bobby just yawned and said he didn't know but he thought I was nice, and he would always take care of me, so I didn't worry any more and went to sleep.



I have a panda out in the barn and the panda's name is Bobby too and at first Bobby the dog was jealous of Bobby the panda until I told him that the panda was only a make-believe Bobby and he was a real Bobby. Then Bobby liked the panda, and the three of us played out in the barn all day. We decided not to tell mommy and daddy about the panda, and kept it for our own secret. It was a big panda, as big as mommy and daddy, and sometimes I thought maybe I would make the panda hurt mommy but then I knew daddy would be sorry so I didn't.

Bobby and I were playing with Bobby the panda the day the doctor came and mommy called me in and made Bobby stay outside. I didn't like the doctor because he smelled like a dirty old cigar and he had a big red nose with three black hairs coming out of it and he wheezed when he bent down to look at me. Daddy and mommy sat on the couch and the doctor said let me have a look at you young fellow and I said but I'm not sick and the doctor said ha ha, of course you aren't, you're a fine looking boy but just let me listen to your chest for a minute. So he put a cold thing on my chest and stuck some tubes in his ears and listened, and then he looked in my eyes with a bright light and looked into my ears, and then he felt my head all over. He had big hairy hands and I didn't like him touching me but I knew mommy would be angry if I didn't hold still so I let him finish. Then he told daddy some big words that I couldn't understand, but in think-talk he was saying that my head still hadn't closed up right and I didn't have as much hair as you'd expect but otherwise I seemed to be all right. He said I was a good stout looking boy but if they wanted a specialist in to look at me he would arrange it. Daddy asked if that would cost very much and the doctor said yes it probably would and he didn't see any real need for it because my bones were just a little slow in developing, and mommy said have you seen other children like that? The doctor said no but if the boy seems to be normal and intelligent why should she be worrying so? Then mommy told me to go upstairs, and I went but I stopped on the top stair and listened.

When I was gone the doctor said now Carol what is it that's really bothering you? Then mommy told him what she had told daddy, how she thought I knew what she was thinking, and the doctor said to daddy, Ben, have you ever felt any such thing about the boy? Daddy said of course not, sometimes he gives you the feeling that he's smarter than you think he is but all parents have that feeling about their children sometimes. And then mother broke down and her voice got loud and she said he's a monster, I know it, there's something wrong and he's different from us, him and that horrible dog. The doctor said but it's a beautiful collie, and mommy said but he *talks* to it and it *understands* him, and the doctor

said now, Carol, let's be reasonable. Mommy said I've been reasonable too long, you men just can't see it at all, don't you think I'd know a normal child if I saw one? And then she cried and cried, and finally she said all right, I know I'm making a fool of myself, maybe I'm just overtired, and the doctor said I'm sure that's the trouble, try to get some rest, and sleep longer at night, and mommy said I can't sleep at night, I just lie there and think.

The doctor said well we'll fix that, enough of this nonsense now, you need your sleep and if you're not sleeping well it's *you* that should be seeing the doctor. He gave her some pills from his bag and then he went away, and pretty soon daddy let Bobby in, and Bobby came upstairs and jumped up and licked my face as if he'd been away for a hundred million years. Later mommy called me down for supper, and she wasn't crying any more, and she and daddy didn't say anything about what they had said to the doctor. Mommy made me a special surprise for dessert, some ice cream with chocolate syrup on top, and after supper we all went for a walk, even though it was cold outside and snowing again. Then daddy said well, I think things will be all right, and mommy said I hope so, but I could tell that she didn't really think so, and she was more afraid of me than ever.



For a while I thought mommy was really going to be nice to me and Bobby then. She was especially nice when daddy was home but when daddy was away at work sometimes mommy jumped when she saw me looking at her and then sent me outdoors to play and told me not to come in until lunch. I liked that because I knew if I weren't near mommy everything would be all right. When I was with mommy I tried hard not to look at her and I tried not to hear what she was thinking, but lots of times I would see her looking first at me and then at Bobby, and those times I couldn't help hearing what she was thinking because it seemed so loud inside my head that it made my eyes hurt. But I knew mommy would be angry so I pretended I couldn't hear what she was thinking at all.

One day when we were out in the barn playing with Bobby the panda we saw mommy coming down through the snow from the kitchen and Bobby said look out Jimmy mommy is coming and I quick told Bobby the panda to go hide under the hay so mommy couldn't see him. But the panda was so big his whole top and his little pink nose stuck out of the hay. Mommy came in and looked around the barn and said you've been out here for a long time, what have you been doing? I said nothing, and Bobby said nothing too, only in think-talk. And mommy said

you are too, you've been doing something naughty, and I said no mommy we haven't done *anything*, and then the panda sneezed and I looked at him and he looked so funny with his nose sticking out of the hay that I laughed out loud.

Mommy looked angry and said well what's so funny, what are you laughing at? I said nothing, because I knew mommy couldn't see the panda, but I couldn't stop laughing because he looked so funny sticking out of the hay. Then mommy got mad and grabbed my ear and shook me until it hurt and said you naughty boy, *don't you lie to me*, what have you been doing out here? She hurt me so much I started to cry and then Bobby snarled at mommy loud and low and curled his lips back over his teeth and snarled some more. And mommy got real white in the face and let go of me and she said get out of here you nasty dog and Bobby snarled louder and then snapped at her. She screamed and she said Jimmy you come in the house this minute and leave that nasty dog outdoors and I said I won't come, I hate you.

Then mommy said Jimmy! You wicked, ugly little monster, and I said I don't care, when I get big I'm going to hurt you and throw you in the wood shed and lock you in until you die and make you eat coconut pudding and Bobby hates you too. And mommy looked terrible and I could feel how much she was afraid of me and I said you just wait, I'll hurt you bad when I get big, and then she turned and ran back to the house. And Bobby wagged his tail and said don't worry, I won't let her hurt you any more and I said Bobby you shouldn't have snapped at her because daddy won't like me when he comes home but Bobby said *I like you* and I won't let anything ever hurt you. I'll always take care of you no matter what. And I said promise? No matter what? And Bobby said I promise. And then we told Bobby the panda to come out but it wasn't much fun playing any more.

After a little while mommy called me and said lunch was ready. She was still white and I said can Bobby come too and she said of course Bobby can come, Bobby's a nice dog, so we went in to eat lunch. Mommy was talking real fast about what fun it was to play in the barn and was I sure I wasn't too cold because it was below zero outside and the radio said a snowstorm was coming, but she didn't say anything about Bobby and me being out in the barn. She was talking so fast I couldn't hear what she was thinking except for little bits while she set my lunch on the table and then she set a bowl of food on the floor for Bobby even though it wasn't Bobby's time to eat and said nice Bobby here's your dinner. Bobby came over and sniffed the bowl and then he looked up at me and said it smells funny and mommy said nice Bobby, it's good hamburger just the way you

like it—

And then for just a second I saw what she was thinking and it was terrible because she was thinking that Bobby would soon be dead, and I remembered daddy saying a long time ago that somebody fed bad things to the Bennet's dog and the dog died and I said don't eat it, Bobby, and Bobby snarled at the dish. And then mommy said you tell the dog to eat it and I said no you're bad and you want to hurt Bobby, and then I picked up the dish and threw it at mommy. It missed and smashed on the wall and she screamed and turned and ran out into the other room. She was screaming for daddy and saying I can't stand it, he's a monster, a murderous little monster and we've got to get out of here before he kills us all, he knows what we're thinking, he's horrible, and then she was on the telephone, and she couldn't make the words come out right when she tried to talk.

I was scared and I said come on Bobby let's lock ourselves up in my room and we ran upstairs and locked the door. Mommy was banging things and laughing and crying downstairs and screaming we've got to get out, he'll kill us if we don't, and a while later I heard the car coming up the road fast, and saw daddy run into the house just as it started to snow. Then mommy was screaming please, Ben, we've got to get out of here, he tried to kill me, and the dog is vicious, he bit me when I tried to make him stop.

The next minute daddy was running up the stairs two at a time and I could feel him inside my head for the first time and I knew he was angry. He'd never been this angry before and he rattled the knob and said open this door Jimmy in a loud voice. I said no I won't and he said open the door or I'll break your neck when I get in there and then he kicked the door and kicked it again. The third time the lock broke and the door flew open and daddy stood there panting. His eyes looked terrible and he had a leather belt doubled up in his hand and he said now come out here and his voice was so loud it hurt my ears.

Down below mommy was crying please Ben, take me away, he'll kill us both, he's a monster! I said don't hurt me daddy it was mommy, she was bad to me, and he said I said *come out here* even louder. I was scared then and I said please daddy I'll be good I promise. Then he started for me with the belt and I screamed out Bobby! Don't let him hurt me, Bobby, and Bobby snarled like a wild animal and jumped at daddy and bit his wrist so bad the blood spurted out. Daddy shouted and dropped the belt and kicked at Bobby but Bobby was too quick. He jumped for daddy again and I saw his white teeth flash and heard him snap close

to daddy's throat and then Bobby was snarling and snapping and I was excited and I shouted hurt him, Bobby, he's been bad to me too and he wants to hurt me and you've got to stop him.

Then I saw daddy's eyes open wide, and felt something jump in his mind, something that I'd never felt there before and I knew he was understanding my think-talk. I said I want Bobby to hurt you and mommy because you're not nice to me, only Bobby and my panda are nice to me. Go ahead, Bobby, hurt him, bite him again and make him bleed. And then daddy caught Bobby by the neck and threw him across the room and slammed the door shut and dragged something heavy up to block it. In a minute he was running downstairs shouting Carol, *I heard it!* you were right all along—*I felt him, I felt what he was thinking!* And mommy cried please, Ben, take me away, let's leave them and never come back, never, and daddy said it's horrible, he told that dog to kill me and it went right for my throat, the boy is evil and monstrous. Even from downstairs I could feel daddy's fear pounding into my head and then I heard the door banging and looked out the window and saw daddy carrying suitcases out through the snow to the car and then mommy came out running and the car started down the hill and they were gone. Everything downstairs was very quiet. I looked out the window and I couldn't see anything but the big falling snowflakes and the sun going down over the hill.

Now Bobby and I and the panda are all together and I'm glad mommy and daddy are gone. I went to sleep for a little while because my head hurt so but now I'm awake and Bobby is lying across the room licking his feet and I hope mommy and daddy never come back because Bobby will take care of me. Bobby is my friend and he said he'd always take care of me no matter what and he understands my think-talk even if he isn't very smart.

It's beginning to get cold in the house now because nobody has gone down to fix the fire but I don't care about that. Pretty soon I will tell Bobby to push open the door and go down and fix the fire and then I will tell him to get supper for me and then I will stay up all night because mommy and daddy aren't here to make me go to bed. There's just me and Bobby and the panda, and Bobby promised he'd take care of me because he's my friend.

It's getting very cold now, and I'm getting hungry.

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