

The Race: An Allegory (The Race, Book 1)

Deleted & Alternate Scenes

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Chapter 0 – In the E.R.

*“Don’t think only about your own affairs,
but be interested in others, too.” Philippians 2:4, NLT*

Chris Strider stripped soiled linens off the gurney and stole another glance at the young mother. The doctor was telling her that her baby needed to take antibiotics for a particularly bad ear infection. But the more the doctor said, the more uncomfortable the woman seemed.

“He can go deaf if you don’t give him this medicine,” the doctor finished brusquely. He handed her a prescription. The mother’s eyes grew wide and flicked to her two daughters, neither more than six years old.

Chris eyed the girls, sitting quietly together on a chair. Too quietly. Kids that age were normally active and curious. Unless they were sick or scared ... or chronically hungry.

He finished cleaning up the results of the baby’s bout of vomiting and waited for the doctor to step out before approaching the subdued mother. “Mrs. Garcia, you can get the baby ready to go home now. The nurse will be in to give you some discharge instructions. I’ll get some supplies together and take care of the prescription for you.” He held out his hand as if this were normal procedure, and the mother handed the paper over with a confused look.

As Chris strode down the hallway to the hospital’s pharmacy, he passed a community bulletin board and caught a glimpse of a light blue flier with a distinctive purple crest.

He forced himself to look away. His life path was clear. He had no time for detours.

Arriving at the pharmacy, Chris handed over the prescription and waited for it to be filled. Luckily, the antibiotic was a common, generic medication that didn’t cost too much. Still, the bill came to \$29.95, even with his employee’s discount. He hesitated when he looked in his wallet to find exactly \$30. Since yesterday was his last day of school, he’d already used up his meal card.

Oh, well. He was too tired to eat breakfast anyway.

He paid the bill and returned to the emergency room, where he stopped off at the break room. From the supplies kept for patient needs, he loaded most of the remaining milk, pudding, bread, and fruit into a sack.

Mrs. Bennington, the charge nurse, came in and poured herself a cup of coffee. As she took a sip, she watched Chris over the rim of her mug. He reached into the freezer for a couple of popsicles. “Food service will throw out the perishables this morning anyway.”

“Mm-hmm.” She swiped a strand of gray hair away from her ebony face and looked pointedly at the bag with the prescription. He broke into a guilty smile.

She chuckled. “You’ll run Damour’s race soon, you will. You just don’t know it yet.” She chuckled again and left the room. Chris stared after her, a sudden heaviness in his gut.

The nurse was just finishing up with Mrs. Garcia when Chris entered the small exam room. When he gave each of the girls a popsicle, their faces lit up. But Mrs. Garcia’s contorted into sheer confusion as he handed her the sacks.

“Just some supplies the doctor wanted you to have,” he said lightly. But it didn’t seem he had fooled her. Looking as if she might burst into tears, she thanked him over and over in Spanish. He didn’t actually understand much Spanish, but people often misinterpreted his dark coloring and assumed he did.

Chris left the cubicle, intending to clock out. But he redirected his steps when he recognized a young girl’s wail. Apparently April’s pain medicine was wearing off again.

As he approached her bedside, the sobbing four-year-old held a hand out to him. He adjusted the sheet so it wouldn’t rub the raw and blistered flesh of her chest and took her hand. Bending over, he whispered in her ear. He’d learned it didn’t matter what he said as long as he whispered.

Sure enough, the little girl quieted just as Mrs. Bennington rushed in with more pain medicine. The medicine took effect quickly, and the young patient’s tight grip on Chris’s hand relaxed.

Her mother released a relieved sigh. “Thanks so much for your help, Chris. You really have a way with kids.”

“I’m glad I was able to help.” An unexpected yawn escaped him.

Mrs. Withers laughed. “Long night?”

“Excuse me. Yeah, long week, actually. Finals week.”

“You’re in college too?”

“Not any more. Graduation’s tonight.”

Mrs. Bennington piped up. “He’s too modest to tell you, but he’s graduating *summa cum laude* and starts medical school at Harvard next fall on a full scholarship.”

“Aw, come on, Mrs. B. Is there anyone you haven’t told?” Chris started cleaning up a tray of medical paraphernalia.

She put a finger to her chin in mock concentration. “Now that you mention it, I don’t think I told the man with the gouty foot. I’ll take care of that right now.” She winked and left the room.

Chris shook his head, grinning. “She’s something. And the best nurse you could ask for, by the way. She’ll make sure they take good care of April.”

He turned to leave, but noticed Mr. Withers, who was sitting with six-year-old Eric on his lap, get up to help move April. When his father put him down, the boy climbed up onto the chair and pulled his knees to his chest. He looked up at Chris with eyes now red and puffy from crying. He was the one who had wielded the pot of scalding coffee that ended the children’s attempt to surprise their mom with a birthday breakfast. Now he would have to marinate in his guilt all by himself for a while, since both parents would be caught up in the commotion of getting April moved to the burn unit.

As Eric’s pitiful eyes met his, Chris knew he couldn’t leave the boy to wrestle with his guilt alone. He stifled another yawn and squatted beside Eric’s chair. “How are you doing, buddy? I bet you’re hungry, huh?”

Eric sniffled. “Yeah, I guess.”

Chris patted the boy’s strawberry blond head. “Well, let’s see what we can do about that.” He approached Mr. Withers and offered to watch Eric until April was settled in the burn unit. The harried father gratefully accepted the offer. He murmured a few words to Eric, who got up and slipped his hand into Chris’s.

As they proceeded toward the break room, they passed a guy with a new cast on his leg. He was clumsily, and unsuccessfully, juggling his cast, crutches, and the two glass doors that led outside. “Here,” Chris called, “Let us get the door for you.” He lifted Eric up to hit the wall plate that opened the doors.

Watching him hobble through the doors, Eric asked, “How’d he break his leg?”

“He’s on the track team at school,” Chris answered. “Runs the hurdles. You know, where they jump over those little gate things?”

Eric nodded.

“His coach told him he was landing wrong, so he learned to do it right and got a lot better. But then he decided he wanted to try it the old way again because he thought he could go faster. He ended up breaking his leg instead.”

“That musta’ hurt a lot.”

“Yeah. Mistakes can hurt.”

“Yeah,” Eric said, his eyes downcast.

When they got to the break room, Chris let Eric punch his timecard, then wet a washcloth to wipe the boy’s tear-streaked face. He deliberately avoided looking at the bulletin board above the sink as he ran cool water. He didn’t want to see that announcement about Damour’s race again.

He got Eric washed up and settled him at the table with a banana, milk, and graham crackers. Mrs. Bennington, the charge nurse, flashed him an approving smile as she entered.

“Mrs. B, do you remember when I first started working here?” Chris nodded slightly toward Eric before sitting beside him. “That really big mistake I made?”

“*You* made a mistake?” Eric exclaimed, blowing out some cracker crumbs with his surprise.

Mrs. Bennington nodded solemnly. “He handed me the wrong bottle of medicine. Coulda’ killed that man.”

“*You killed him?*” Eric exclaimed.

“No, no,” Chris said hurriedly. “Mrs. B caught the mistake before she gave the man the medicine. But I still felt really bad about it.”

“That’s right,” Mrs. B said. “He was talking ’bout quitting. Instead, he decided to learn from his mistake. He slowed down, got more careful ’bout things, and became the best orderly we’ve ever had in this ER.”

“Wow,” Chris said, surprised. “Thanks, Mrs. B. That means a lot coming from you.”

“Well, it’s true.” She focused on Eric. “That’s what comes of learning from mistakes, you know. You get better at your job. ’Cause everyone makes mistakes.”

“Everyone?” Eric asked.

“Yup, everyone,” she said with an emphatic nod. “I’ve made my share, too. And every doctor you see ’round here, they’ve made mistakes too.”

Mrs. Bennington left and Eric fell silent, absorbed with poking a packaged cracker into subjection. Chris simply let the silence ride.

Finally Eric said softly, “I made a mistake today.”

“Yeah? I’ll bet it wasn’t as bad as mine,” Chris said. “You didn’t almost kill someone, did you?”

“No, but ...” He hesitated. “Mommy told me never to touch the coffee maker. I thought I could get it okay if I got a chair and climbed up on the counter. But ...” He started crying again. “It was really hot, and, and April was there, and ...”

Chris put his arm around Eric’s shoulders and the boy buried his face in Chris’s scrub top as he cried. When his sobs had settled into sniffles, Chris said, “That’s a hard mistake. And you can’t quit your job as April’s big brother, can you?”

Eric shook his head against Chris’s chest.

“I know it’s hard to see April hurt by your mistake,” Chris said soothingly. “But it was an accident. You didn’t mean to hurt her. That doesn’t make you a bad person. Or a bad brother. In fact, maybe you learned something to help you be a better big brother.”

Eric sat up and wiped his nose on his sleeve. “I been thinking I shoulda’ minded Mommy.”

“Mm-hmm. That’s an important lesson. If you learn that one, it’ll keep you from making lots of big mistakes.” Chris handed Eric a tissue and he blew his nose.

As Eric finished his milk, Chris said offhandedly, “April’s going to be in the hospital for a while. Do you know anyone who can bring her stuff, like her favorite books or toys, and help her with things that will be hard for her when she goes home?”

Eric looked up at him with the gleam of newfound purpose in his eyes. “I can do those things! And, and I’ll take care of Muffin for her, too! That’s her guinea pig.”

Chris tousled Eric’s hair. “Hey, that’s a great idea! What a good big brother you are!”

When Eric finished eating, Chris, noticing the dark circles under his eyes, moved to the black vinyl loveseat along one wall, and settled back with an unfeigned yawn. “How would you like to hear a story about my great-grandfather? He was a runner from a group of people called the Rarámuri.”

“The what?”

“Some Native—um, Indians, who live in Mexico.”

Eric’s eyes widened. “Are you an Indian?”

Chris shrugged. “I’m part Indian, but I’ve never lived with them. I do know some stories, though. Want to hear one?”

“Yeah!” Eric climbed onto the loveseat next to Chris.

“Okay. I’ll tell you about the day my great-grandfather left his village to go on a very long run ...”

Chris had nine nephews and plenty of experience putting them to sleep. Telling his story in a deliberate monotone, he soon had Eric’s head bobbing. He gently lowered the boy’s head to a pillow as he

continued the story. Soon Eric was fast asleep, curled up beside Chris on the couch. Shortly thereafter, Chris's head fell to his chest in slumber.

It was over an hour later that Chris awoke with a start (and a sore neck) to see Mario, one of the other orderlies, standing in the doorway with Mr. Withers behind him. "So you gonna give that kid back to his parents or what?"

Chris frowned as he tried to orient to where he was. "Oh, Mr. Withers," he said after a long moment. "I'm sorry. I was telling Eric some stories. I guess we both fell asleep."

Mr. Withers grinned. "I guess that means you got him settled down. That in itself is quite a feat." He gently scooped Eric up, resettling his head on his shoulder. The boy barely stirred. "The nurse told me you worked all night and stayed on your own time to help us out. Thank you. We really do appreciate it."

"No problem," Chris said. "Glad to help."

After Mr. Withers left, Chris got up to clear the remnants of Eric's meal from the table. When he washed his hands at the sink, he forgot to avoid looking at the bulletin board and his eyes came to rest on exactly the announcement he'd wanted to avoid:

Announcing
THE DAMOUR FOOTRACE
6,000-mile loop around the USA
All finishers become heirs to the Damour fortune
Start Date: July 18
1-800-D-DAMOUR



[istock.com/stefanschurr](https://www.istock.com/stefanschurr)

Before Chris knew it, he was daydreaming again, wandering through state parks, historical monuments, and national landmarks. He could smell the wildflowers as he ran through golden fields, feel the breeze playing in his hair as he stood atop snow-covered mountains, and hear the birdsongs as he toured redwood forests. Though only a dream, it was breathtaking.

Chris loved these little trips into never-never land, but he just couldn't run that race. Not now. He would run it some other time. There were more important things to do now. Going to Harvard med school on a full scholarship was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He couldn't pass it up to go gallivanting off after ... what?

That was the thing. His main reason for wanting to run the race was simply the call of adventure. It's true there were tangible rewards. Being an heir to the world's largest fortune would sure be nice. And he'd heard stories of the trophies, which included jewels, gold, and the word "priceless." But to risk his whole future?

“You still here?” Mrs. B’s voice brought Chris back to the break room. “You shoulda’ left two hours ago.”

Chris turned toward her. “I’m heading out now. Just got sidetracked.”

She smiled knowingly. “You’re a softie, Chris. And the kids, they know. Never mind the way you tower over ‘em, there’s not a one that can’t read the kindness in those sweet eyes and quick smile of yours. You’re gonna be a great doctor.”

Feeling himself flush, Chris bent to sweep some imaginary crumbs from the table.

“But I tell you what, we’re really gonna miss you ‘round here.” She stepped toward him and gave him a fond hug.

“Hey, Mrs. B,” interrupted Mario as he rounded the corner. “How ‘bout savin’ some of that action for me?”

She spun to face him, hands on hips. “Mario, the day you graduate from college *summa cum laude* and go off to Harvard medical school on a full scholarship is the day you get some of this action!”

Mario chuckled. “So you through?” he asked Chris.

“Yup.”

“Cool, man. Congratulations,” Mario extended his fist. “But you better watch out. I hear they only got smart people out there at Harvard. Don’t know if you’ll fit in.”

“I’m wearing a disguise,” Chris confided, butting Mario’s fist with his own.

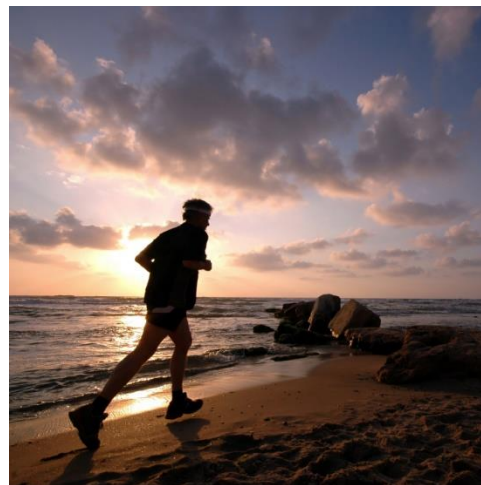
Mrs. B. gave Chris one last hug. “Now don’t you forget us, baby.”

“Never, Mrs. B. How could I forget the woman who taught me how to empty a bedpan?”

[I would have loved to start the book with this chapter because it so aptly portrays Chris’s kind, tender side, which doesn’t always come through. However, it drew out the book’s introduction—that is, everything before the actual race—too long, risking the possibility of boring the reader before the book even started.]

Chapter 3

Training on Sand



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The next morning, Josh took him to the beach to train on sand. After about twenty minutes of running on the wet sand near the shoreline, Josh directed him up higher on the beach. “Let’s try the dry sand.”

Chris groaned inwardly. He hated running on dry sand. The stuff shifted around so much, it made running exponentially harder. Nevertheless, he obeyed his coach without argument.

After running for a little while, Josh said, “Let’s pick up the pace a bit.”

Chris gave him a sidelong glance to see if he was joking. He didn’t seem to be, so he obediently matched his pace, even though his calves were already aching from the workout. Soon, however, that ache turned to fire. Sweat poured down his chest and back. Still, he ran, trying desperately not to let his pain show.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. He pulled up to a sudden stop, his sides heaving, and leaned against a large rock to stretch out his fiercely burning calves.

Josh, mildly winded, came up alongside him. “That’s enough for today. We’ll train more on dry sand in a few days.”

Chris groaned.

Josh turned to him. “Something wrong?”

“No, Coach.” Chris’s mild response came from years of training, but he still grumbled under his breath, “I just really hate dry sand.”

“The race starts in Death Valley. That’s on dry sand—hot, dry sand—during the fiercest part of summer. And there won’t be any cool ocean breeze there.”

Although Chris knew the race started in the desert during the height of summer, he hadn’t pictured what that would look like. Or feel like. As he stood there, still gasping after running on dry sand in 70-degree weather, all his romanticized pictures of the racecourse disintegrated. In their place rushed more realistic pictures of him on the full racecourse: dodging prickly tumbleweeds in 120-degree heat,

trudging through snow in stinging, icy winds, struggling up mountain after mountain, delayed by bad weather and injuries. Benny's words from the evening before came back to him: It's a fool's mission, little brother. A fool's mission.

Chris dropped to a cross-legged position on the beach and buried his face in his hands. What had he gotten himself into?

Josh sat beside him. "Have you started reading The Manual, kid?"

"I looked through it."

Josh tilted his head back, following a seagull's flight. "You're an excellent athlete, Chris. Well-trained, in great shape, and you've won plenty of races. You know how important mental preparation is."

"What's your point?"

"The mental prep for this race is studying The Manual."

Chris sifted sand through his fingers. This was embarrassing to admit but, "I don't always understand what it's talking about."

Josh smiled. "You're unusually honest. And insightful. Most people would say it was boring rather than admit they didn't understand it. But you're right on the mark. Reading The Manual requires a different type of thought process. I'd be happy to help you with it, if you want me to."

"Yeah. Maybe we could give that a try."

From then on, Josh prodded him out of bed an hour earlier each morning to study and talk to Doug. Soon he began to feel a real connection with them both.

Chapter 16: Patric's Six Expectations

"I'm sorry, Janet. You know I'd help if I could." Patric hung up with the Vice President's assistant and glanced at the clock. Dr. Desmon was running late. Today of all days.

Turning to his new undersecretary, he said, "Look, Lana, the first Thursday in January's a bad day to start up here. We call it Report Day. So here's a head's-up—just do what you're told and stay out of Dr. Desmon's way. In fact, it would be best for all concerned if she doesn't even notice you're here. She doesn't need any grief from new secretaries today."

"What's the Report?"

He scowled at her. "Lesson Number One—curiosity kills the cat. Everything on this floor is need-to-know. Ask too many questions or poke your nose around areas you're not cleared for, and you'll find yourself downstairs being interviewed by Dr. Sondem as a potential traitor."

Her eyes widened. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean anything. I wanted to work up here to help us get back home. I'd never do anything to jeopardize that."

"If that's true, we'll get along fine. But all you need to know about the Report is that it will make Dr. Moden mad—it always does. The doc has to step in to calm him down because she's the only one who can. In other words, she's a hero today, so treat her like it."

When she nodded understanding, her apparent willingness to please induced him to soften his tone. Lana was a good friend of his sister. He really should try to make this work out, or he'd catch it at home. "Look, I know you've heard Dr. Desmon's impossible to please. That's what all her ex-secretaries told me when I started up here. It's not true, though. Actually, she's very easy and predictable once you figure a few things out, like her priorities and the Six Expectations. The most important thing to know is that her number one priority is getting us back to the Island. She'll listen to any idea that will help move us toward that goal, without regard for proper channels or different social ranks or anything else."

Lana grabbed a steno pad and scribbled some shorthand. "And what are the Six Expectations?"

"You expect me to just hand you something that took me the better part of a decade to figure out?"

"Well, it would keep things running more smoothly, wouldn't it?"

Patric chuckled. Seemed she'd already figured out his weak spot. "All right, I'll tell you. One: Obey immediately and without question. Two: Don't make mistakes. Three: Pay proper respect. Four: Keep things tidy. Five: Keep the company's mission first in your priorities, as it is in hers. Six: Anticipate her needs. That one's mostly my job, but it could become yours when I'm not here."

She finished jotting them down. "Thank you, sir."

"Patric," called Iona, another undersecretary. "This call's for you. The Vice President."

"Uh-oh." He pasted on a smile and picked up the phone. "Good morning, sir!"

A gruff voice trying to be ingratiating answered. “Janet tells me we have a problem, Patric. Is there no way I can have lunch with Dr. Desmon? I know it’s unexpected, but I really need to see her, and I’m only in town for the day.”

“Well, sir, as I told Janet, Dr. Desmon is free for dinner. The rest of her day is booked solid.”

“Who’s her lunch with? Someone more important than the Vice President of the United States?”

Patric didn’t answer. He’d never divulge the doc’s engagements, and the VP wouldn’t consider the Saudi Crown Prince more important than him anyway.

“I see,” grumbled the VP. “Hold on.”

While muffled voices exchanged words on the other end, Patric inventoried the first aid supplies in his bottom drawer.

“All right,” the VP said. “I’ll rearrange my schedule. We’ll do dinner.”

“Good,” Patric said brightly. “I’m glad we could work something out, sir. I know she’ll look forward to seeing you.”

The VP grumbled something and hung up.

Chuckling, Patric set the phone in its place. Humans—they all thought they were so important.

“Lana,” he called, “go down to Employee Health and get me another portable ice pack, some hydrogen peroxide, and some ibuprofen. Oh, and some antacid. Then go to the cafeteria and get me a bucket of crushed ice.”

She jotted down the items. “Will Employee Health give them to me, just like that?”

He frowned. “Not a good start, Lana. Expectation Number One—obey immediately and without question—remember?”

“I’m sorry, sir.” She started toward the VIP elevator.

“No, not that one! That’s only for Drs. Moden, Desmon, and Sondem. Expectation Number Three—pay proper respect.”

She flushed and mumbled an apology. As she headed down the stairs, the guard at the doc’s door looked at his buzzing cell phone. “She’s on her way up, Patric.”

The VIP elevator dinged, and Patric bounded toward it. “Morning, doc!” He reached out to relieve her of pocketbook and briefcase, coat and scarf, but she stopped short, her gaze fixed at the junction of his fuchsia suit and chartreuse shirt. Although he liked colors, he stunk at combining them. Sometimes his flub-ups bothered the doc’s exquisite sense of style.

“Change shirts?” he guessed. It was the usual solution.

“Yes,” she said evenly. “And tie, I should think.”

He glanced down. In retrospect, he should have guessed an orange tie with red cartoon characters wouldn't go with fuchsia and chartreuse. “Yes, ma'am. Thank you.”

The doc's pointing out such things would offend some people, but not him. She was a phenomenal woman—classy, talented, and brilliant. If she condescended to help him navigate the confusing ocean of colors, he would accept her advice gratefully, just as he felt grateful to her for honoring him with such an elevated position in the organization.

Chapter 17:

Susana rejoins Chris in Texas



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Chris had almost reached the spot in West Texas where Susana left off by the time she returned to the racecourse. When he and Josh finished their afternoon run that day, he broke into a big smile at the sight of Debora's motor home in the campground. "Hey, look! Susana's back!"

Josh flashed a knowing grin. "So's my mom. Doesn't she merit a mention?"

"I think I smell chicken enchiladas," Chris said, sniffing the air. And he was right. Susana had spent the afternoon cooking up a big meal, including enchiladas, and they all enjoyed the results at dinner. When Josh and Debora got up to clear the dishes, Susana jumped to her feet. "No! I'll take care of—"

"You've been cooking all afternoon," Josh interrupted. "We can do the dishes."

"But—" Susana began.

"Perhaps you two would enjoy a walk?" Debora said.

"But—" Susana began again.

This time it was Chris who interrupted with a hearty laugh.

Susana frowned at him. "What's so funny?"

"Can't you see what they're doing?"

"Yeah, my dirty dishes."

"They're trying to give us a chance to be alone." Chris whispered this, but in the motor home, it was audible to everyone.

Susana looked at Debora and Josh, who were exchanging smiles. "Oh," she said, and dipped her blushing face.

Chris led her outside. "Sorry I embarrassed you," he said as they walked. "Or maybe I'm not. It's cute, the way you duck your head when you blush."

She smiled sheepishly. "I should have caught on. I'm kind of new at this dating stuff."

"Why does that embarrass you? It's not like there's something wrong with you."

"Of course there is! It's these scars that—"

He drew her close and put a finger to her lips. "You are the most incredible girl I've ever met. There's nothing wrong with you. The problem is with the people who can't see past your scars."

* * *

The next morning Chris swung his bare feet to the ground, only to spy a scorpion just a few inches from his foot, its tail curled up and ready to strike.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed as he jerked his feet back up. He reached for a shoe, but noticed that, strangely, the scorpion didn't move. Then he remembered that Susana was back and became suspicious. Grabbing a nearby pencil, he gingerly poked at the critter. It bounced.

Chuckling, Chris impaled the rubber scorpion on the pencil, pulled on some pants, and flung open the door of the motor home. Experience had taught him that Susana liked to be nearby when her pranks were discovered. Sure enough, she was standing right outside the motor home, giggling.

Chris presented her with the skewered animal. "I do believe you've lost your pet scorpion, ma'am."

Through laughter she cried, "Oh no! You killed it."

And so began their first day back on the road. After not running together for five months, Chris appreciated Susana's company more than ever. They laughed at everything from cloud formations to bugs' antics. And when they decided to sing along with The Manual's songbook, they laughed some more because, of course, it's hard to sing on key when you're running. Before Chris knew it, they'd finished the day's run and were at their new campsite near Waco.

Chapter 21½ – Listening

*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
John 10:27, NIV*

[Originally a separate chapter between the current Chapters 21 and 22; parts were assimilated into the current Chapter 22.]

It was early April when Chris and Susana stood in the museum at Moundville Archaeological Park, gazing down at the re-creation of a burial site. When Susana suddenly pulled out her transmitter and activated it, Chris felt a twinge of envy. She'd obviously heard Doug's untranslated voice over the receiver. Why couldn't he?

Doug talked to Susana about a discouraged runner who was in the hospital in Tuscaloosa and asked her to visit that evening. When they finished talking, Chris activated his transmitter. "Doug, I guess Susana heard you call through the receiver portion of her device. Why is it I only hear you when the transmitter's activated?"

Doug hesitated. "Son, would you meet me in the men's room?"

"Um, sure." Chris looked around for a sign. He shrugged to Susana as he headed off in the indicated direction. When he got to the empty restroom, he said, "Okay, Doug, why am I in the bathroom?"

"Well, I don't much care for discussing personal issues in front of other runners. What you tell Susana yourself is up to you, but she won't be hearing it from me."

Did he have a "personal issue"? Chris began pacing, fingering his necklace as he did.

"Now as to answering your question, it's like this. The translator translates my voice into sub-*lashani* frequencies so it's easier for y'all outlanders to hear. What's audible over the receiver, though, is my voice unaltered, in *lashani* frequencies."

"I understand." That much Josh had already told him. "So, Susana can hear the *lashani* wavelengths and I can't. Why?"

There was a pause, during which Chris came to stand before the sinks. When he looked at the mirror in front of him, he noticed he was developing a mild rash under his necklace. He made a mental note to pick up some ointment for it.

"Chris," Doug said at last, "this issue has been a hard one for you, and my own heart feels right heavy on account of it. But it comes down to one word, son: surrender. And, at this point, there's not much use in me telling you more than that."

As they ended the conversation, Chris again came to the mirrors and stood there, gazing into his own face. What could Doug possibly mean? Hadn't he already given up or risked everything to run this race? What more could Doug possibly want?

After dinner that evening, Susana went into Tuscaloosa to visit the runner Doug had called about. Chris went along and, while she was at the hospital, picked up some ointment at the store. He picked up a few other things as well, including the largest, prettiest Granny Smith apple he could find. By the time Susana was through with her visit, he was all set.

As Susana came off the elevator, Chris rose from his chair in the lobby. "How'd things go?"

"Good." Susana was glowing, as she always was when she'd helped someone. "Kenisha—that's her name—had surgery this morning for a badly broken ankle. She'll be out for several weeks and was really bummed. She still doesn't have a coach."

"Really?" Chris held the front door open. "It's amazing she got this far without one."

"It is. After we talked a while, though, she decided to accept one. So we talked to Doug and he's sending her a coach tomorrow morning. She'll be okay."

"I see why Doug wanted you to visit her. You're so empathetic. Just what she needed."

Susana blushed and dipped her head.

"I got you something." He plucked the apple he'd been working on from his backpack. "I saw them and remembered you like Granny Smiths."

"Oh, that's so sweet! Thank you." She reached up to plant a kiss on his cheek before taking a bite of her prize. She munched happily for several bites while they walked to the car. Then she screamed and flung the apple up in the air.

Being prepared for this reaction, Chris managed to catch the apple. "What's wrong?"

"There's a worm in it!" She was spitting out all remnants left in her mouth.

"Yeah?" Chris, trying to hide a grin, turned his head away from her to look the apple over. "Oh, sure enough."

The grin successfully under control, he turned toward her as he pulled the worm out of the apple and put it in his mouth. "Mm-mmm."

Susana grimaced. "Eww. That's just gro—" A smile crept across her face. "Oh, I get it." She dove into Chris's backpack and, finding a package of gummy worms, burst into laughter. "That was a good one. You really got me that time. But you ruined a perfectly beautiful apple."

"Oh, about that ..." Chris went deep into his backpack and pulled out a bag of Granny Smiths. "Here you go. And you owe me for those. Fruit's really expensive around here compared to home."

She smiled broadly and gave him another kiss on the cheek. "Thank you."

"Hey, wait a minute. If a wormy apple's worth a kiss on the cheek, a whole bag of good apples should be worth—"

Susana pulled him down by the collar and gave him a big kiss.

"That's more like it."



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Chapter 28: Rosie's Wedding

Two days before Rosie's wedding, Chris stood between the living room and dining room of his home, watching the bustle. Around the coffee table in the living room, Susana and the other bridesmaids were making centerpieces for the tables at the reception. Several of Chris's nephews were on the floor making favors. In the dining room to his left, his sisters-in-law were folding programs and organizing gifts. He could also hear Rosie on the phone in the kitchen, coordinating the arrival of the caterer, baker, and others.

As Chris took it all in, he felt overwhelmed. He'd never realized there was so much to do to get married!

Josh slipped up behind him and whispered, "Don't worry, the bride's family generally takes care of the wedding preparations in the U.S."

Chris chuckled. "Thanks." Josh's uncanny abilities no longer unsettled him.

Josh started to walk away, but stepped back, rubbing his chin. "But, come to think of it, the groom's family is primarily responsible for the wedding in Mexican culture."

Chris lost his smile.

Josh slapped Chris on the back, his mouth twitching. "Well, I'm sure you two can work out a little thing like that."

* * *

Chris was standing in the foyer with Rosie, awaiting the signal for her entry, when she suddenly turned to him. "I'm nervous."

"Don't be. Ivan's a great guy and you're perfect for each other. And you look fantastic. There's no reason to be nervous. Just enjoy the moment."

"Thank you," she said with a smile. "You always know what to say. And when not to say anything."

"That's your fault. You're the one who taught me to—how did you put it?—'Just shut up, stand still, and hold me when I cry?'"

Rosie laughed. "You'll make a good husband someday. You're well trained." She paused before adding matter-of-factly, "You should marry Susana, you know. Soon."

"Should I?" Chris tried to be nonchalant, but he knew his eyes were twinkling.

Rosie gasped. "You are, aren't you? You're going to ask her!"

Chris bowed his head, struggling to keep the silly grin off his face, and she tugged on his arm, much as she had done when they were young. "Tell, tell!"

Rosie had always kept his secrets, and he hers. He leaned close to her ear. "Tonight."

She squealed and threw her arms around his neck. That's how the audience caught them when the door opened for her entry. As they started up the aisle, Rosie murmured, "You have to call me and tell me her answer."

"I'm not calling you on your wedding night," Chris whispered back.

"Oh, that's right. Well, email me then. Promise."

"Okay, I promise. Now maybe you should pay attention to your grinning groom up there. If I were him, I'd be getting jealous."

Susana's Gift

When they returned to Cheyenne, the coaches took the newly engaged couple out for a congratulatory dinner. As the meal was winding down, Susana pulled a gift-wrapped package out of a bag and handed it to Chris. "I'm sorry your birthday present is a little late, but I finally finished it."

He unwrapped the gift and lifted the lid of the box inside to find a scrapbook. When he opened it to the first page, he caught his breath. "DAD," read big letters above a picture of Dad with Chris, still in his cap and gown at his high school graduation.

Chris looked through the labored-over pages slowly, each one recalling treasured memories. Rosie also enjoyed scrapbooking, so Chris had some idea of how much work went into a project like this. Even if he hadn't, though, he would have cherished this scrapbook. Besides old pictures, there were mementos from Chris that Dad had kept all these years, like the Father's Day card Chris had made in second grade. There were also souvenirs from special times they'd shared, like the ticket stubs from the Dodgers game Dad had taken Chris to—only Chris—on his tenth birthday. It amazed him—touched him—that Dad had kept these things.

"This is so amazing," Chris breathed. "Where did you get all this?"

“Rosie’s been sending me stuff as she found it. She just gave me the last of it when we were there for the wedding.”

“It’s so incredible. Thank you.” He studied another page or two and suddenly realized, “Something like this requires a lot of cutting. That’s how you keep reinjuring your hand, isn’t it?”

“It’s no big deal. My hand heals.”

Putting an arm around her, he drew her close. “Thank you, tesoro. This means so much to me.”

“I’m glad you like it,” she said humbly.

But she was absolutely glowing, which caused Chris to wonder what he’d ever done to deserve such a woman—one whose greatest joy was found in bringing joy to others.

[This scene is still one of my all-time favorites because it just typifies who Susana is. Unfortunately, the book was getting far too long, so this is one of the scenes that ended up on the editing room floor, so to speak.]

Chapter 29.5:

Troubled

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Trust in God; trust also in me.” John 14:1*



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[Originally a separate chapter between the current Chapters 29 and 30]

Chris was grumbling his way through Yellowstone. There was no other way to put it. Most of his grumbling was silent, but his obvious discontent had already won him several puzzled looks from Susana.

When the coaches suggested taking a few days to sightsee here, Chris had been excited at the prospect. But that had been before they were engaged and before they set a wedding date—which was now only four months away. Issues in Susana’s extended family had forced the early wedding date, something about expiring green cards and stuff Chris didn’t understand. He was happy to be marrying Susana sooner than he’d imagined, but he was concerned that they didn’t have enough time to arrange a proper wedding by January 6. Not that he cared about the details, he just didn’t want things thrown together in a substandard way.

Besides his concerns about the wedding, becoming engaged had also stirred up his dormant worries about med school. Would he get in? How would he afford it if he did? Yes, he knew loans were available, but he’d also heard about doctors spending twenty years working off the huge sums they racked up by the end of med school. And, with the hours his studies would require, where would he find time to work? The only thing he could figure was to finish this race posthaste, go to work, and start saving.

So, as Susana and the coaches marveled at grazing bison, Chris was calculating that, if all went well, they should finish the race in late November. Of course, there was no guarantee of things going well, was there? As the others admired Old Faithful, it dawned on him that they might run into another delay—snow in the mountains. That even raised the possibility that they would be unable to finish the race before the wedding. And, as they wandered among Yellowstone’s paint pots, it hit Chris: they would soon be called to testify at the trial of Cleveland’s rapist—another delay!

By then, Chris was ready to pack up and leave Yellowstone that very minute. That’s why, when he noticed Susana’s interest in a teenage girl with a limp, he wasn’t sympathetic. As she started to move in the girl’s direction, he caught her hand. “Please don’t.”

She looked at him in surprise. “Why not?”

“Because I know what’ll happen. You’ll make friends and figure out a way to help her. Then we’ll be stuck here for weeks while you do.”

“Don’t be silly. It just looks like a problem adjusting to a prosthetic device. It won’t take weeks.”

He didn’t know how she knew that—he didn’t see any prosthesis—but obviously, she was missing the point. “Okay, so I’m exaggerating. The point is, I don’t want any more delays. I just want to finish this race and marry you.”

“Chris, are you still worrying about the wedding? I told you, my mom and I have everything under control. Besides, I can’t just walk away from someone I can help.”

“Please, Suze. Can’t we talk about this?”

“Of course we can—later. Right now I have a job to do.” She kissed his hand before dropping it to walk toward the girl.

Chris sighed. Susana could be just as stubborn as he was. Furthermore, she didn’t mind changing plans to help someone. She’d already proven that. First she’d hung back three days to help a guy with a pulled muscle at the starting line. Then she’d spent a whole month helping a girl with a broken leg in Arizona. Of course, she’d also accepted some delays for him, but that was different.

He followed Susana and was reluctantly congenial as she made friends with the sixteen-year-old brunette, Dawn, and her mother, Maryann, from Whittier, near Los Angeles. As they talked, Chris watched Dawn closely, but even with Susana’s observation to clue him in, he couldn’t detect a prosthetic device. Nevertheless, it turned out that Susana was right. Dawn had recently had her left leg amputated because of bone cancer. Before surgery, her mother had promised her that, as soon as she recovered, they would take a road trip to wherever she wanted to go. They just hadn’t realized until they got here that Dawn hadn’t yet adjusted well to the prosthetic leg.

Susana mentioned that she had worked for a specialist in prostheses and maybe she could help. She invited Dawn and Maryann to have dinner with them, after which she turned the area between the motor homes into a temporary physical therapy clinic. Frustrated, Chris retreated to Josh’s motor home and plopped onto the sofa bed to read.

Josh followed him in and started putting away the lunch dishes drying on the counter. “Susana’s really good at helping people like Dawn. So compassionate and tender. Good eye, too, able to identify problems and figure out ways to help.”

“Yup.”

“As I remember, it was her compassion that first attracted you to her.”

Josh's reminder caused Chris to stop reading, although he didn't look up.

Setting a plate in the cupboard, Josh continued. "You know, it's not unusual for the things that first attract people to one another to end up becoming things that annoy them. For example, a Type-A guy's attracted to a laid-back, carefree woman precisely because she helps him see life a little differently. But after they marry, her nonchalance about punctuality and inattention to detail interfere with his preference for order and schedule keeping. So he tries to change her—to make her more like himself—when they would be more effective if they worked together as a team, uniting their different strengths. Instead, they end up miserable and working against each other."

"You mentioned that before, about trying to change each other."

"So you do listen when I talk."

Chris granted him an unwilling smile. "Sometimes."

He got up and leaned over the table to watch Susana through the window. The collar of her rose-colored blouse fluttered playfully around her neck, the color accenting the happy flush of her cheeks. "But how do you live with the annoying things?"

Josh leaned back against the counter. "First, by focusing on the positive aspects of the trait. Your life may not be as predictable with Susana in it, but it will be richer. In fact, if you take the time to listen to her, you'll probably learn some things that will help you with your own patients. Anyway, think about it: would you really want her to be less giving?"

Chris slid into the seat, noting Susana's ready smile as she walked back and forth across the yard with Dawn. "She'd be frustrated, wouldn't she?"

"Exactly. Another thing that will help is to remember the same principle we talked about before: Dad uses everything for your good. He already sees you as a unit, not just as two individuals. He considers both of your needs. He won't give Susana a job to do that will negatively affect you. You don't have to worry about that possibility."

Chris turned to him. "What's this about a job? Susana said something like that too."

"Dad gives each runner a special and unique job to do based on their personality and talents."

"So you're saying I'm interfering with the job Doug gave Susana to do?"

Josh nodded. "Yes, kid. That's exactly what I'm saying."

"But—" Chris started to object and then sighed in surrender. "I think I need some *wadí*."

Josh went to get the inhaler and handed it to Chris. "Just keep it."

After using the medication, Chris rose to leave. "Thanks, Josh. What would I do without you?"

Josh caught his arm. "Chris, one more thing."

"Yeah?"

"Don't worry about tomorrow's troubles. Take each day as it comes."

Chris nodded his understanding, although he wasn't sure he agreed. He hadn't gotten to be valedictorian of a large high school class by going with the flow. He didn't graduate college *summa cum laude* by trusting fate. And he certainly didn't win a full scholarship to Harvard medical school by letting someone else take care of business. No, these things came from planning and hard work. Josh smiled. "There's a difference between planning for things and worrying about those plans."

It was freaky how he did that.

As Chris left the motor home to take a seat at the picnic table, he saw that Dawn was already walking better. Susana had apparently made some minor adjustments and was calling out reminders and encouragements as Dawn walked back and forth in the yard. By the time Dawn and Maryann left, Dawn was walking more comfortably and confidently, and both had even become interested in running the race.

Susana sat down by Chris at the picnic table. "You wanted to talk?"

"Yeah." Putting his arm around her shoulders, he kissed the top of her head. "I wanted to tell you I'm sorry for what I said earlier. You're a beautiful person, *tesoro*."

* * *

Chris stepped in front of an empty aisle seat to let a lady with a little girl pass. He'd been pacing ever since Susana fell asleep, shortly after their plane took off from Spokane.

The passing girl, an almond-eyed cutie, looked up at him. "Are you ...?"

He sat on the seat to put himself at her level. "Am I what?" he asked gently.

"Are you a *giant*?" The awe in her voice hinted at fear.

He smiled. It wasn't the first time he'd gotten this question from children. "No, but I guess I look like one to you." In a whisper, he added, "But the only people I ever eat are bad people who hurt little girls."

She giggled as she continued down the aisle with her mother.

He turned to look at the center section row behind him where Susana was asleep, her black hair shining against the red upholstery. She looked so peaceful. He rested his chin on his fist as he wondered how she could rest so well, even as they were flying to Cleveland to testify against her attacker, Jason Shadrack McMootin.

Chris was as nervous as he could ever remember being. But it wasn't him he was concerned about. In fact, he'd hardly thought about his own stint on the witness stand. What did worry him was how this would affect Susana. He'd heard that testifying could traumatize a victim all over again, and he figured she'd suffered enough. Susana rarely complained, but he remembered how restless she'd been after the attack, how she'd cried, how vulnerable and jumpy she'd been.

Wait—had she been the jumpy one, or was that him? Maybe it was both. Anyway, she'd been through enough. They both had.

The girl came back down the aisle. "Are you watching a bad man? You look sad."

He smiled at her. "No, but I was thinking about a bad man."

"Don't worry. Doug cares for the little, little birdies." She held her hands close together to show how little. "And us too."

Chris marveled at her simple trust. "Thanks. I'll remember that."

That night, in his hotel room in Cleveland, Chris looked up the passage in *The Manual* that the little girl had referred to. He read it over a few times, understanding its content intellectually, but unable to make it his own.

He'd come to think that Josh's idea of letting Doug do the worrying had some merit. In fact, it was starting to sound pretty good. Yet he couldn't figure out how to actually *do* that. As he reflected on the passage, he pulled out his *raberi* and played some old runner's tunes. The familiar melodies soothed his mind until he finally slipped into a troubled sleep.

Chapter 33:

Excerpts from Chris's Trial



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The trial was, in a word, awful. The judge didn't even attempt to hide his bias against Chris. He allowed all of Stan's motions, overruled all of Josh's, and routinely allowed procedural violations. Even so, Josh's defense was extraordinary. Chris was often as amazed by his tenderness as by his astuteness. His cross-examination of Charmaine was a good example.

"Mrs. Piper," Josh began, "please allow me to express my very deepest sympathies for your loss."

The genuine sympathy in Josh's voice seemed to catch Charmaine off guard. She looked at him in wonder. "Thank you, Mr. Damour. You are very kind, sir."

"I'm afraid I must beg your indulgence as I question you. I've never met you. On the other hand, I and my family have known Mr. Strider and his family, even his fiancée and her family, for generations. I know him to be a kind and compassionate man—"

Stan jumped up. "Objection!"

"Sustained." In his heavy southern accent, the judge added sternly, "Counselor, quit gushin'. If you've got a bona fide question, ask it."

Stan reseated himself and gave Chris a mocking look that seemed to say, See there? I've got them all in my pocket, boy, and I'm going to use them to get you.

Josh turned back to the witness. "Mrs. Piper, you testified that Mr. Strider coerced you into the car at the grocery store. Are there witnesses to confirm your version of events?"

"No, sir. There was no one else there. Otherwise, I know my kind neighbors would never allow such a thing." Although her eyes looked dry to Chris, Charmaine dabbed at them with a black lace-edged handkerchief that matched her high-necked black cotton dress.

"I'm certain they wouldn't." Josh walked toward the jury box, where eight white men and four white women sat with perpetual scowls on their faces. "You didn't notice, then, that there were two ladies present who witnessed your interaction?"

Charmaine glanced over Chris's shoulder at Susana. "I saw no such persons, sir. But I have no doubt that any honest person would verify my story."

"I see. Can you describe for us exactly how Mr. Strider coerced you? Was he armed? Did he use brute physical force?"

Stan shifted in his chair.

"He had no weapons, sir. But he is very strong and, as you can see, I'm just a little bit of a thing."

"Yes ma'am, you are. Can you tell us what he did? Perhaps he grabbed your arms, or your neck?"

"Objection!" Stan called. "Leading the witness."

Charmaine waved her handkerchief at the judge. "That's all right, Horace. I know how he hurt me." Returning her attention to Josh, she answered, "He grabbed me by both arms first, then 'round my throat."

Stan started doodling on some paper.

Josh nodded. "And you're right, he is very strong. I should know, I've trained with him and know how—"

"Objection!" Stan exclaimed.

Josh didn't bother waiting for the judge's response. "Apologies, your Honor."

Stan flashed Chris that look again.

"You see," Josh continued, "that's one of the things that puzzle me, Mrs. Piper. Even I would bruise if Mr. Strider forcibly grabbed my throat. I certainly would expect a delicate, fair-skinned lady like you to bruise."

"Oh, but I did, Mr. Damour! I had a pack of bruises and scratches on both arms, and bruises all over my throat."

Chris thought he heard Stan emit a quiet groan.

"Oh, good!" Josh exclaimed, and Charmaine pulled back, obviously offended.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Piper. I don't mean that your physical injuries were good. Such injuries would be painful and embarrassing, I'm sure. What I mean is that there will be pictures then, to substantiate your account."

"No, sir. I didn't think to take any pictures."

"No, of course not. The situation you describe would be very upsetting. But your husband, being the conscientious and decorated lawman he was, would know to document your injuries."

“They were gone by the time he got home, sir.”

“That was three days later?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Really? So you’re Paradisian, Mrs. Piper?”

“I am not!” she said indignantly. “I am American, sir, born in this very town, as were my parents and their parents before them.” Applause broke out and Charmaine nodded at her neighbors.

With sadness in his voice, as though it gave him no pleasure to expose Charmaine’s lie, Josh addressed her again. “Mrs. Piper, perhaps you would like to rethink your testimony. Or shall I call your physician to testify? For, as a physician myself, I can tell you that there has never been any circumstance documented, except in native Paradisians, which would allow such bruising—bruising that would require two to three weeks to heal—to heal in three days instead.”

Stan sprang up. “Objection! Badgering the witness!”

“Sustained,” the judge agreed.

But Stan couldn’t give Chris the look that time. Josh had quietly moved between them.

Chris felt Josh made more progress in his cross-examination of Tony, who looked flushed and jittery throughout. When Josh questioned him about the lack of fingerprints on the gun, Josh managed to back Tony into a position of claiming that Chris’s fingerprints weren’t on the gun because he was wearing rubber gloves due to a contagious rash on his hands.

In a British accent, Stan muttered, “Imbecile. Donkey.”

Josh followed up by pointing out that the prison had to keep records of contagious diseases in its prisoners, and that no such record existed to substantiate the claim of a rash on Chris’s hands. Chris was pleased to see that a few of the jurors’ scowls changed briefly to puzzled expressions. Josh later called the officer who booked Chris, who testified that he had no rash.

In this way, Josh managed to cast doubt on each of the evidences against Chris. And, when Debora and Susana testified about what they had seen pass between Chris and Charmaine in the parking lot (to which Charmaine exclaimed, “Well, I never!”), Chris noticed several of the jurors exchange knowing looks.

Stan didn’t call Debora or Josh to testify about Chris’s period of absence, nor did he cross-examine Debora. He simply asked the judge and jury to note that she was Josh’s mother. Josh had said Stan may do this since he wouldn’t be able to attack their character or trick them into looking foolish. He preferred, therefore, not to examine someone he was, to put it bluntly, afraid of.

Stan did bring up Chris’s absence when he cross-examined Susana. But he also questioned her in a way that especially angered Chris. He began by asking about her dating history. Josh objected to that line of

questioning, but the judge allowed it. Stan proceeded to make Susana out to be a woman desperate for love, one who would do anything to retain the attentions of the one man who seemed interested in her.

Josh had warned Chris that Stan would likely do this, not only as a prosecuting angle, but simply to torment Chris. Still, being forewarned didn't make it any easier to watch Susana being humiliated.

Once Stan finished grinding Susana under his heel, he asserted that Chris was obviously manipulating her—"the poor, desolate soul"—in order to have someone who would do his bidding and tell his lies. He finished by asking the jury if they had ever seen a lower life form.

The jury answered by shaking their heads in obvious disgust.

Thank You!

Thank you for your interest in Chris's adventure! Stop by DellaLoredo.com to get more information on other books and to sign up for my blog/newsletter if you'd like to stay current as things are added.

Did you know that Chris's adventure continues? The series has a total of five books! So if you like Christ-centered adventure with dynamic characters and encouraging stories of faith that also challenge you to a deeper relationship with God, check out the full Race Series!



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In *The Race: An Allegory*, track star Chris Strider forfeits his own dream-come-true to fulfill the dying wish of the grandmother who raised him—that he run a grueling, 6,000-mile footrace. What neither of them know is that this puts him squarely in the crosshairs of the heartless mogul who killed his mother

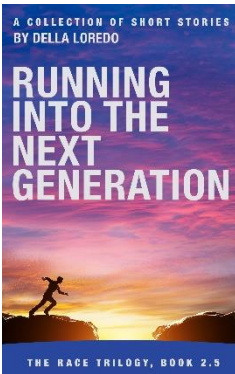
One 6,000-mile footrace plus one ruthless enemy equals one unforgettable journey! Get *The Race: An Allegory* (**Book 1** in the series) and join in Chris's adventure today!



A chance encounter puts Susana's new husband on their enemy's hit list ... and her perfect dream life suddenly becomes very fragile. Their sponsor assures her that he'll take care of everything if she just trusts him. But trust was a whole lot easier when the stakes were smaller.

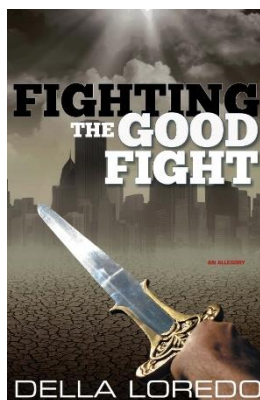
Yet when her perfect life shatters, and her only hope is to surrender, will it be too late?

Keeping the Faith: Still Running is **Book 2** in The Race series.



The 20-year hiatus between Books 2 & 3 of The Race series is fraught with problems. The enemy is ready with plenty of distractions for the Strider kids, while the Moden “offspring” are starting to think for themselves. But how long can that last when they’re raised by the two most evil people on the planet? Can mercy reach even to them?

Running Into the Next Generation, Book 2.5 in the Race series, is a collection of short stories collected from the 20 years between Books 2 & 3. Catch your copy to fill in the gaps today!



She kills on command. He tortures for sport. Yet they’re still Stanley’s little brother and sister, and he yearns to rescue them from the brutes who raised them all. Racing against the clock that’s ticking off Earth’s final hour, he finally gets the chance. But he has second thoughts when he learns how deeply they’ve surrendered themselves to evil.

Fighting the Good Fight is **Book 3** of The Race series This explosive conclusion follows the Strider family through the harrowing end of the world. But first they have some tough choices to make.