

Charlie's Summer Season



by J.E. Solinski

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J.E. Solinski

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Dedication

To my brother Doug,
the Luke of our family

Acknowledgments

Once again I am reminded of the number of people it takes to bring an idea to a finished product. *Charlie's Summer Season* is the third book in the Charlie Moynahan series, and I am thankful for the consistent and candid team around me. First of all, to my primary reader, Linda Taylor, whose honesty and encouragement keeps Charlie true to herself and me true to the craft. Thank you to my editor Genevieve Healey and her willingness to answer all my tedious questions with patience. Thank you to Tiffanie Tran for her ability to capture and recreate Charlie's essence in her wonderful cover art. And finally, a huge thank you to my Creative Director Pamela Lee, who has been with me from the beginning, and whose support and encouragement has made all my novels and short story collections possible.

Chapter 1

Charlie slapped her glove against her left thigh a couple of times, wiped her throwing hand down the front of her right thigh, shoved the toe of her right shoe into the dirt twice and then did the same with her left—all while staring at the ground. Finally, she looked up, adjusted her cap, and glanced toward the bleachers across the infield from her, hoping to see some friendly faces. But it wasn't happening.

From her position as shortstop, the afternoon sun was directly in her eyes, which made it hard for her to see anything. She released a sigh. She would just have to hope they had all come to watch.

“GO CHARLIE!”

Charlie smiled. Well at least Harold had arrived.

Harold was Charlie's best friend and had been since ... forever. He lived right across the street from her and loved baseball and, in particular, the San Francisco Giants. In Charlie's opinion, Harold would have played for any of Carlisle's Little League teams, but in true Harold fashion, he had charmed himself onto the league's own Giants and couldn't be happier. Even on non-game days, he found a reason to wear his jersey or at least *something* orange and black.

“LET’S GO CHARLIE!” he yelled again.

Charlie smiled again, then slapped, rubbed, dug, and adjusted one more time before crouching into her ready position for the pregame warmup, her coach having finally arrived at the plate with a handful of balls. Harold was the last person she had expected to arrive on time since he had had practice right before her game. So, if he was here ... she relaxed ... then the others were here as well. She knew it. It was her first game of the summer league season. They wouldn’t miss it.

The others were Charlie’s family, Rudy, Sarah, Mrs. Harris and Mark, her son.

Her family was a no brainer. Her parents made it a point to come to all of her and Luke’s events. Luke was her older brother—a pain sometimes, but overall an okay guy. He played baseball too, but he loved basketball. Then there was Emma who was three and a half and probably wouldn’t see a single play of the game because she would be climbing up and down the bleachers all evening.

And finally, Jesse, the newest member of the family. He was born on Christmas day last year and had Down syndrome. Her parents had done their best to prepare Luke, Emma, and Charlie for how this baby would be different, explaining what Downs was and showing them some YouTube videos. But when he was born, all Charlie could see was Jesse—her little brother. And to her he was beautiful. She knew where he would be during the game, too. On Luke’s lap. If Jesse never learned to walk, it would all be Luke’s fault ’cause he never let Jesse out of his lap.

She knew Rudy Roberts was there too. Rudy was the new kid in the neighborhood. Well, he was a year ago. And Charlie hadn’t liked him one bit then. He had treated her like a girl, became too good of a friend to Harold, who was supposed to be *her* best friend, and didn’t talk much. The trifecta of sins.

Trifecta means a set of three, her brother Luke had once told her, and, since Charlie liked the sound of the word, she tried to use it as often as she could. And Rudy's three character flaws fit perfectly. But, of course, that was before Charlie had known him—*allowed* herself to know him. Now he was one of her best friends. Just like Sarah.

If Rudy was Charlie's first big surprise of a friend, then Sarah Morris was definitely her second. While Charlie liked having short hair, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and playing football with the boys, Sarah was all girl. She had long, wavy brown hair that was never out of place and always had a bow—which always matched her outfit. Charlie called it an outfit because it all went together. Coordinated. Tidy. Perfect. That was Sarah. Charlie just wore clothes.

Sarah used to make Charlie nervous. That was until the robbery at her house last summer, when she and Charlie were thrown together because Harold had decided that he and Charlie were going to capture the thief. Suddenly, Charlie was spending *a lot* of time with Sarah, and most of it in Sarah's coordinated, tidy, perfect pink room.

But then Charlie had seen all the adventure books Sarah had read and all her swimming ribbons, and she had learned that Sarah woke up every morning at five to go to practice—even in the winter—and that she wanted to write books about girl athletes. For the second time, her perception about someone and the reality of who they really were didn't match, and Charlie had learned a valuable lesson. Don't make assumptions.

Charlie smiled. She knew where Sarah would be sitting too. Right next to Mrs. Harris because Sarah genuinely cared for people, and Mrs. Harris was old. Charlie didn't know how old, but she had gray hair, was stooped over, and used a cane. But she too was one of Charlie's friends. Charlie had met Mrs. Harris last winter, right before Christmas, when she and Harold

were trying to solve *another* mystery, and they needed to talk to her.

From the minute Mrs. Harris opened the door and invited Harold and her in for cookies and treated them like real detectives, Charlie liked her. Then when Charlie discovered that *she*, Mrs. Harris, had played softball not only in high school but also in college, and not just played, but played *shortstop*, just like Charlie ... well ... the friendship was cemented.

That left Mark, Mrs. Harris's son. Mark was fifty ... and he had Downs. Just like Jesse. But Mark also had a job, went to school, and played basketball in the Special Olympics. Mark was Charlie's hero.

"Okay, Jasmine! Throw to first!"

Coach Lafferty's voice brought Charlie back to the present, and she watched him hit a tepid grounder down the third base line. Third baseman Jasmine Davis moved in to pick it up, pivoted, and threw toward first. The ball was a bit right of the mark, but Olivia Spencer easily stretched to her left while keeping her foot securely on the bag and snagged it.

"Good job, Jasmine. Nice stretch, Olivia," Coach Lafferty yelled.

Olivia threw the ball toward home where catcher Daisy Fong was waiting. She caught it easily, then tossed it to Coach Lafferty.

"Nice catch, Olivia!" Charlie yelled across the diamond, and Olivia smiled.

Charlie's eyes stayed on Olivia a bit longer. Though not technically one of Charlie's friends, Charlie was getting to know Olivia Spencer better and had a growing admiration for her.

Olivia had been in Charlie's fifth grade class last year, and when Olivia started taking things from the classroom trash can, Charlie was sure she was up to no good. Charlie decided it was

her job to expose Olivia for who she really was—a thief or a drug dealer.

But Olivia proved to be neither. Instead, Charlie had learned that Olivia was homeless and the trash can provided her with discarded pencil stubs. If Charlie had felt bad about hating Rudy and misjudging Sarah, she had *really* felt bad about accusing Olivia of being a criminal. As a way of making up for her mistake, Charlie had invited Olivia to join the summer softball league, and Olivia had readily accepted. But when Charlie had found out that parents had to pay for their children to play, she had felt a sudden panic as she knew Olivia's parents didn't have any money.

"It's nice of you to want to help," her father had said to her with a smile when she asked if she could wash the car each week to make some money to help Olivia, "but the league has scholarships to help kids who can't afford it. I will let the president know that Olivia could use one."

And then Olivia had wound up on the Bruins, Charlie's team. Whereas little league teams were named after pro baseball teams, the softball league used college mascots, and Charlie dreamed of playing for UCLA one day. Unlike Harold, her father refused to use any influence to get her on the Bruins, so she had to revert to prayer. Her parents warned her that God wasn't a vending machine to provide her with her every want, and that perhaps He *might* just want her on a different team, so she shouldn't be disappointed if He did. Charlie also wasn't sure that team selection qualified as high on God's priority list, but she had prayed anyway. And when she landed on the Bruins, she figured God was a UCLA fan too.

"Okay, Charlie. First base!"

Charlie moved her attention back to home plate and took her position, hoping Coach Lafferty would put a little more speed on his hit to her, but this one was another mild roller, and Charlie had to move forward to field it. Even as she was

moving, she remembered to square herself before lowering both her glove hand and her free hand down to the ground. She slid her glove under the ball and, as she came up to set herself, her right hand wrapped around it.

The rest was easy. Push off the right leg, extend the left, and release. Whereas Jasmine's throw was a bit wayward, Charlie's was right on point—and hard. The ball sizzled through the air and when it hit Olivia's glove, a large POP could be heard not only on the diamond but in the stands as well.

“WOOHOO, CHARLIE! GREAT THROW!”

Charlie's pride at her on-target, bullet-like throw lost some of its luster, however, when she saw Olivia wince from the sting. Charlie waited, but Olivia didn't look her way, just tossed the ball toward home.

“Nice throw, Charlie,” Olivia yelled from across the field as she moved back toward first, but Charlie saw her take her hand out of her glove and rub it on her leg.

Charlie felt herself warm in embarrassment. That throw had been unnecessary. She had done it to impress the people watching from the stands, but it wasn't a smart throw. Not for her first of the warm-up and Olivia's second catch. She could have hurt her arm and Olivia's hand.

Charlie felt herself deflate as she trotted back to her position. She was always doing stuff like that. Things to make people notice how good she was. She tightened her lips and shook her head. Growing up was incredibly hard. You were always learning stuff about yourself you didn't want to know. Either your parents were pointing it out to you, or you learned it the hard way—by saying or doing something stupid that ended up hurting someone.

Learning it was hard enough, but changing it was harder. Sometimes you didn't want to because that would mean admitting you were wrong. It would mean you had to think

about others before yourself. It would mean ... Charlie shook her head again. It would mean a lot of stuff ... too much to think about right now.

She watched as Coach Lafferty hit to second baseman Mia Young. Mia's parents had wanted her to be a soccer player so named her after Mia Hamm, the US Olympian and World Cup player, but *this* Mia didn't want anything to do with kicking a ball. She wanted to hit, catch, and throw one, and she was good. Charlie watched her smoothly swoop in, scoop up the dribbler, and underhand toss it to Olivia—all without missing a beat.

“Good job, Mia!” Charlie yelled. Mia turned and smiled as she trotted back to her position, but she wasn't through yet. Coach Lafferty hit another soft one down the first base line, and Olivia raced toward it, leaving her bag unattended. Mia immediately ran to cover and was right there by the time Olivia had the ball securely in hand and turned to throw. The play was executed flawlessly. Though only a warm-up drill, the Bruins' side of the stands clapped in appreciation.

“YEAH! NICE JOB OLIVIA! WAY TO GO, MIA!”

Charlie smiled. Harold again. And it would be Harold for the rest of the warm-up and every play of the game. There wasn't a person Harold didn't like, wouldn't help, or wouldn't befriend. He was Mr. Positive ... Mr. Enthusiasm ... Mr. Nothing Can Stop Us ... all in one.

Chapter 2

“**S**orry, Charlie.”

Charlie looked at Harold whose eyes were full of sorrow and who didn't know what to say. He had rarely seen Charlie lose.

Charlie smiled wanly in return. She was a bit perplexed as well. She had lost games before, but rarely like this. All sorts of weird things happened. A ball that was hit right at her suddenly took a freakish bounce at the last second and went shooting over her shoulder for a base hit and a run, and an error for Charlie.

Center fielder Maria Decarlo was just waiting for a high fly ball to center to fall into her mitt, made a last-minute adjustment, and tripped. Three runs came in.

Mia made a fantastic backhand stab of a stop, turned to toss to second for the forced third out, and couldn't get the ball out of her glove. Another run scored.

Offensively it was even more bizarre. Strong hits went right to opposing players. Home run hits went foul at the final moment. Good batters were fooled by soft pitches.

Then in the last inning, when the Bruins had a chance to even up the score, left fielder Harper Chambers hit a line drive to left. It looked like it was going to split the seam between short and third and drive in the tying run, but the Bulldog third

baseman blindly stuck her arm out at the last minute and caught it. The SMACK could be heard throughout the field, and everything and everyone just stopped. Everyone except Maddie Armstrong who was already halfway home. By the time she realized what had happened, the Bulldog third baseman had come out of shock and run back to tag her base, ending the inning and the Bruins' chances of a comeback.

"It wasn't your team's fault, Charlie. You just had a lot of bad luck out there," Sarah noted.

Charlie tilted her head in thought. *That was a lot of bad luck, wasn't it?* She felt herself start to warm from anger. *That's not fair. That's not a fair way to win a game or lose a game. And now we are one game down to a team we should have beaten.* She could feel her frustration begin to grow.

"You never can tell whether bad luck may not after all turn out to be good luck."

Charlie, Harold, and Sarah all turned to look at Rudy.

"What does *that* mean?" Harold asked.

Rudy pursed his lips. "Not exactly sure, but Winston Churchill said it when he dislocated his shoulder. I always thought it was a good way to look at bad luck. Kind of makes it lose its power."

Harold shook his head, Sarah smiled, but Charlie just stared.

Just like Rudy, she thought. He rarely talks and then when he does, he says something that takes the wind right out of your self-pity sails and makes you think.

• • •

"That was a tough loss, Charlie."

Charlie looked across the car seat that held Jesse at Luke, trying to judge whether he was being sarcastic or sincere. His look told her sincere. She let out a sigh.

"Yeah," she said and turned to look back out the window. What more was there to say? First game of the season and

they were already in the hole—to a team that they should have beaten. And they would have ... if.

She opened her mouth to explain that they really hadn't lost, that they were the better team, that it was really just because of all the bad luck—but decided not to and snapped her lips shut. What difference would it make? They still lost. All she would be trying to do was look good again, and she was learning that that never really turned out too well. People knew when you were showing off. She thought back to Vacation Bible School last summer when she was supposed to sacrifice bunt to bring in a run, but she had wanted to hit a home run and be the hero. The result? She had flied out, the team had lost, and she had looked like a heel. Another trifecta—this time from a bad decision. Then today, she had thrown that blister of a ball to Olivia. Despite Harold's enthusiasm, the rest of the crowd had been silent. Not a good sign.

She looked back toward Luke and caught Jesse staring at her from his car seat. She smiled, tickled his chin, and cooed at him. He giggled and she felt the loss melt away.

"We'll play them again," she said, her focus still on Jesse, "and *next* time we'll beat the pants off of 'em!" she added emphatically.

• • •

Mr. Moynahan had watched the exchange from the rear view mirror, ready to step in and gently correct his daughter should her takeaway of the game turn a bit sideways. Charlie had a habit of not taking defeat well. But his intervention had proved unnecessary. Charlie had handled it well. He smiled. His daughter was growing up.

• • •

He watched as everyone emptied the stands and headed toward their cars, paying little attention to him standing by himself off to the side of the bleachers behind the visitor's dugout. When the final car had left, he moved out in the open, came around

the fence, and walked to home plate.

He took his stance in the batter's box, looked toward the pitcher's mound, and then stepped in to swing at an imaginary pitch. When he finished his follow-through, he felt his heart sink and a garbled moan catch in his throat. He stood back up, looked at the empty field, then turned toward the empty bleachers, and finally the empty parking lot and felt all that emptiness seep into him.

No one had noticed him. No one knew he was here. No one cared. He took one more look around the field, his eyes finally settling on an idea. Next time they would.

Chapter 3

“Charlie, I’m going shopping. I want you to keep an eye on Emma while I’m gone.”

Charlie opened her mouth to protest, but her mother didn’t give her a chance to gain momentum.

“And after you finish vacuuming, clean the sliding glass door, please,” she added.

Charlie’s eyes widened to match her mouth. This was not fair. Where was Luke in all this? He was two years older than she was ... a *teenager* in a little over a month. Sibling care should fall on *him*. Jesse always went with their mom, so what would *Luke* be doing all this time? She could feel her temper ramping up.

“Wha—” she began, but her mother stopped her with that cold, deadly stare that said, “Don’t even go there.”

“Have Emma help you and then find something to do together,” she finalized, picked up her purse and the car seat with Jesse already strapped in, and headed toward the garage. “And no complaining,” she added, not looking back but knowing that Charlie’s face had turned from the shock of unfairness to the scowl of irritation. She knew her daughter.

Charlie listened to her mother’s footsteps grow softer and then waited for the sound of the back door shutting. Once it did, she released the entire weight of her frustration.

"Not fair!" she announced. "Not fair at all! Where's Luke? He's gonna help me with this!" Charlie headed down the hall toward her brother's room.

"You otay, Charlie?"

Charlie wheeled around to see Emma standing in the middle of the family room with Squiggy, her stuffed elephant, her big brown eyes just watching Charlie. Charlie felt her anger begin to dissipate but not her indignation. Luke was still going to have to account for himself.

"Yeah, I'm okay," she said. "I just need to find Luke."

Emma's eyes lit up. "Loook," she said excitedly. "I find Loook. I love Loook." And she ran past Charlie and down the hall.

"Now wait a minute," Charlie said, following her. "Don't you love me?"

"Loook," Emma called as she opened Luke's bedroom door, ignoring Charlie's question. She exited a moment later and headed toward the back door, Squiggy now being held by one of his ears and turning flips in Emma's hand. "Loook," she yelled again.

Charlie's ire was now replaced by concern. *Doesn't Emma love me?* she wondered, hustling after her before she could get too far.

Emma had left the door wide open, and Charlie jogged after her a bit panicked. Emma could get into trouble very quickly. But not this time. Charlie exited the house right as Emma ran up to Luke and wrapped her arms around his legs.

"LOOOOK!" she squealed. "I found Loook!"

Charlie came to a stop and watched the interaction.

"Hey there, M&M," he said, addressing Emma by his personal nickname while at the same time trying hard to maintain his balance as Emma put the full weight of her thirty-pound body against him. He reached down, grabbed her, and lifted her up. "Why are you lookin' for me?" He held her

against his waist and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. Emma giggled.

“I’m not an M&M,” she protested. “I’m a girl!”

“No, you’re my little M&M ’cause you’re good enough to eat,” countered Luke, and he started nibbling at her neck. Emma burst out laughing and tried to wriggle out of his arms. Luke gave her one more mock big bite then set her down.

That’s why she loves him, Charlie thought contritely, *Because he loves her*. She thought about that. *She* loved Emma. She really did. She hesitated. But she rarely ever showed it. Even after giving Emma a homemade coupon book for Christmas that promised coloring sessions and cookie baking, she never really paid up willingly, but begrudgingly. Not so with Luke. He liked playing with Emma and, even when he was busy, he would stop and give her some attention. Charlie was beginning to feel that all-too-familiar discomfort that came with realizing she was being selfish or childish. She had momentarily forgotten why she was looking for Luke in the first place. When she remembered, she felt embarrassed but figured she better take the offensive.

“Emma and I are going to vacuum and clean the slider,” she announced to disguise the true intent of her appearance. “What are you doing?”

Luke heaved a heavy sigh and looked around the garage.

“Dad wants me to clean the garage, then pick a wheelbarrow full of oranges and juice them.”

“I make some juice,” Emma said excitedly.

“Don’t you want to help me vacuum and clean the slider?” Charlie asked, hoping to gain back a little ground with her sister, but really not sure what Emma could do to help. Emma wrinkled her nose and pursed her lips together in thought. Then she shook her head.

“Nope,” she stated flatly. “I make juice.”

Luke laughed. “Tell you what, M&M,” he said, kneeling

down to her level and speaking in a conspiratorial tone. “You take the little vacuum and help Charlie, and by that time I might be through here in the garage. Then you can help me pick oranges. How about that?” He looked up at Charlie for her approval. Charlie wiggled the idea around in her mind. Luke had solved two problems in one sentence. A way for Emma to help ... and then not have to help.

“That could work,” Charlie said. Luke turned back to Emma and put out his hand.

“Deal?” he asked, a sly smile on his lips. Emma mimicked the smile, a gleam in her eyes. She slid her hand into his.

“Deal,” she replied, and the two shook on it.



Having Emma use the little portable vacuum had been ingenious. Charlie put the small floor attachment on the end and set Emma to work on the edges, while she took the big vacuum to the rest of the floor. Charlie noted that Emma didn't do a very good job ... at all ... but that was beside the point. Emma believed she was helping, and Charlie was able to get her work done.

True to his word, Luke took Emma out to the orange trees and pointed out the few within her reach while he climbed the ladder for the upper ones. But it wasn't long before she grew tired and lost interest and came back to where Charlie was finishing up the slider, climbed up onto the chaise lounge, and played her arms and legs. Charlie laughed.

“Tired—” She tried to think of a clever nickname for Emma herself but couldn't and figured it was too late anyway. She always called Emma—Emma. “Tired?” she repeated.

Emma nodded. “Yup.”

Charlie grinned, wiped off the final window cleaner, and balled up the paper towels.

“Well, how about a popsicle for all your hard work, and then we can color for a bit while we wait for Luke to finish.”

Emma bounded off the chaise and clapped her hands in excitement.

“I love popsiles!” she said. “I love color.”

I hate coloring, thought Charlie. *Tedious.*

Charlie picked out one lime and one strawberry popsicle, secure in the knowledge that she would be happy with whichever one Emma didn’t choose. Emma picked strawberry. Charlie unwrapped both of them, and the two of them sat on the chaise lounge. They watched as Luke, high up on the ladder with their grandpa’s old avocado-picking bag slung over his bony shoulder, picked oranges and plopped them in the bag. The bag began to pull from the weight, and Charlie could see Luke strain to keep his balance.

Charlie was impressed. Luke was strong. And kind. And a hard worker. While she was ... Charlie thought for a moment. What was she? She was strong. She worked hard ... well, when she had to. She was kind ... hmmm, sometimes, but it didn’t come naturally. She glanced over at Emma who was trying hard to keep up with her melting popsicle, but the ninety-degree heat was winning and causing red syrup to drip all down her sunsuit.

Alarmed, Charlie was about to remind her—in a very loud voice—to be careful, that their mother would be upset that she had messed up her sunsuit, but she stopped herself. Emma was doing the best she could, and, if Charlie were really being honest, her main concern was that her mother would be upset with *her* for giving Emma a popsicle and letting her get all sticky.

Charlie stalled for a minute. *What would Luke do?* she asked herself as she watched Emma falling behind in her battle with the heat and popsicle. Suddenly, Charlie started, stood up, and raced into the kitchen, returning with a plastic cereal bowl.

“Here, Emma,” she said, sliding the bowl under the popsicle held tightly in Emma’s hands. “Sit back a bit and

place this on your lap. It will catch the juice.”

Emma did as she was told, and Charlie watched her plan work perfectly ... well, sort of. When she wasn't licking it, the melted popsicle juice landed nicely in the bowl. But when she went to take a lick ... it ran right down the front of her sunsuit and exposed skin.

“Tanks, Charlie,” Emma said between sucks. Charlie sat back enjoying her partial victory.

Emma finally finished and handed Charlie her stick. Charlie took it and nodded toward the bowl.

“You can drink the rest of the popsicle juice out of the bowl if you want to,” she said, knowing this is *exactly* what Luke would do. Emma's strawberry-red smile told Charlie she had hit a bullseye, and Charlie smiled in return. Emma placed the bowl to her mouth. Half of it did make it into her mouth, but the other half dribbled out the sides. Charlie's smile faded. Now what? Her mother would be home any minute, and Emma was a mess.

Charlie's eyes darted around the yard, landing on the hose. She smiled. Yup. Exactly what Luke would do. And, fortunately, it was already hot.

“Emma, you want to get wet?” she asked. “I'll spray you off. It will feel good and get all the sticky stuff off of you.”

Emma nodded and slid off the chaise lounge, handing Charlie the bowl as she headed to the lawn. Charlie laid it on the patio table and ran ahead of Emma.

“Now you stand here,” she said, positioning Emma so the spray would hit the flowers and not the patio, and then headed for the hose. The spray nozzle that she used to water the flowers that morning was still attached. Charlie turned on the spigot.

Luke had finished filling his bag and was just stepping off the ladder when he saw Charlie grab the hose and head toward Emma.

“What the—” he said softly, trying to figure out what was going on. When it suddenly dawned on him, he yelled louder. “Charlie! Wait! I switched the—”

The jet of water that shot out of the hose hit Emma solidly in the chest and drowned out Luke’s last word. Emma’s feet flew out from under her and she landed firmly on her backside.

“Awwwwwww!” she screamed in surprise.

Charlie released her grip on the sprayer, then just stood there dumbfounded, looking at her little sister.

“Setting,” Luke repeated weakly.



Other books by J.E. Solinski

Meet Charlie

Charlie Moynahan is happy that fourth grade is over and summer is underway . . . that is until a new kid, Rudy Roberts, moves into the neighborhood and disrupts Charlie's world.

However, when a robbery occurs around the corner at fellow fourth grader, Sarah Morris's house, Charlie, with the help of best friend Harold Streeter, begins her own investigation, hoping not only to earn the reward money but also to put Rudy Roberts in his place.

Meet Charlie takes the reader on an adventurous journey of self-discovery, as Charlie learns about prejudice, misunderstanding, friendship, and sacrifice.

Charlie Christmas Adventure

Christmas is only four weeks away, and Charlie's Sunday school class has been tasked with solving four riddles to complete a scavenger hunt and learn the meaning of Advent. But when items start disappearing from her front yard, Charlie and her best friend Harold have a real mystery to solve.

But all is not what it seems. The Advent scavenger hunt teaches Charlie more than she ever wanted to learn, while the real mystery seems headed for a dead end. In addition, Rudy's past is uncovered, Sarah's family secret revealed, and Harold's deepest desire disclosed.

Charlie's Christmas Adventure is all about friendship, family, growing up, and one very special gift.

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A Matter of Control

Five very different people wrestle with the ultimate question: Who is in control?

Martha Richards is a high school teacher who prides herself on her efficiency in the classroom and her ability to solve problems. Three of Martha's students—Reba Washington, Alex Kowalski, and Travis Richards—and Martha's own son, Danny, find themselves entangled in a web of best intentions that Martha creates and then tries to control. But her intervention brings unintended consequences for everyone.

In *A Matter of Control*, faith is tested and illusions are shattered as each of the five comes face to face with the truth of who is really in control.

In the Father's Hands • The Sequel to *A Matter of Control*

Montgomery High School English teacher Martha Richards has watched Reba Washington, Alex Kowalski, and Danny Richards work hard to realize their dreams. But what about those who have their dreams wrestled out of their hands? Four individuals must come to terms with this difficult reality.

In the Father's Hands reminds the reader that though our lives might take unexpected twists and turns, God always has his loving hands around us and our circumstances.



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