

HOHAs in LOVE



The lessons of *RUNNING* reveal the secrets of love

HOHAs *in* LOVE

a novel

Laurence Graham

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When we walk,
one foot is always on the ground;
but when we run, there is a moment,
as brief as it may be,
when both feet are in the air,
and we can truly say we fly.

COACH

Falling in love
is like climbing a tree:
it is easy to get up
and hard to get down.

GLORIA

Go in your own direction,
and go at your own speed.
Now look around.
The place you see is your home.
The people you see are your friends.

BISCUIT

Running isn't just some sport, Grandma.
Running is a way of life.

ANDY

We don't win when others fail.
We only win when we don't fail ourself.

MOSES

Death: it is nothing;
it just finish Chuck off.
But love: Oh my God!
It play with Chuck first.

CHUCK

If you need a hand,
I have two:
one for me
and one for you.

JUNE

Time is a master magician.
It distracts us with one hand,
while playing its trick with the other.
It holds out the future,
while stealing our past.

UNCLE BILL

CONTENTS

1. On Your Mark	3
VISIONS	7
2. Ninety Miles	9
3. The Holy Ones	12
4. My Sweet Angel	20
5. Coe vs. Ovet	23
6. A Terrified Smile	31
7. Just Plain Ridiculous	33
8. Wedding Cake	41
9. Pony Express	46
10. Wake Up, Mr. Bill	50
11. A Love Story	60
12. Coach	64
13. Building a Club	66
14. Magic Shoes	71
15. A Second Calling	76
16. First Rule of HOHA	79
17. To Your Health	81
18. The Terminator	84
19. Snail's Pace	91
20. An Omen	95
21. The Classic	99
22. Puzzle Pieces	104
23. The Oldest HOHA	107
24. Healthy Heart	112
DESIRES	123
25. Birds of a Feather	125
26. Lucky in Love	132
27. A Man for All Seasons	137
28. Biscuit	142
29. Underdogs	150
30. The UFO	155
31. Bad Bob	163
32. Cross-Country	170

33. Small but Mighty	178
34. Your Dream Come True	182
35. A Mile in the Winter	184
36. HOHA Gothic	187
37. The Striders	190
38. Back to Basics	196
39. Destiny	200
40. Yahtzee!	208
41. The Cardinal Sin	212
42. Age-Group Birthday	221
43. Siren Song	225
44. Pillow Talk	230
45. HOs vs. HAs	233
46. Ice Cream	240
47. Party of Two	249
48. Matchmaking	250
49. In My Sleep	255

DREAMS 261

50. Made in Heaven	263
51. The Elf	268
52. Enemies	273
53. On Track	277
54. Mile 20	281
55. Last Run	287
56. Honorary HOHA	294
57. The Series	297
58. A Nutcase	301
59. In Mysterious Ways	306
60. A Good GM	312
61. If You Need a Hand	315
62. The Big Dance	320
63. Bringing It Home	327
64. Y2K	333
65. Welcome to Hoboken	335
66. An Old Photo	338
67. The Pure Land	345
68. In Another Lifetime	351
69. Won't That Be Sweet!	354

HOHAs *in* **LOVE**

1. On Your Mark

Emmitt F. Bean, the founder, first president, and coach of the Hoboken Harriers Running Club—or the HOHAs, as the club affectionately came to be known—was a visionary, a goofball, and the luckiest man alive. Coach was one of those young men—rare, yet belonging to every generation—who believe that anything is possible and that by thinking positively enough and working hard enough we can overcome any obstacle, vanquish any opponent, and achieve success on our own terms. Young men like Coach apply their can-do philosophy to endeavors as varied as science, business, politics, art, and even sports. Indeed, Coach's love was for sports, and he believed that running was the purest of sports and therefore most worthy of his passion and energies.

Running is pure, Coach believed, because it exists only in space and time. There is no ball, puck, bat, net, or even a field. There is just a starting line, a finishing line, and the time that separates them. It is nothing less than birth, death, and the valiant struggle in between. The start is innocence, the finish exhaustion, but oh how our blood rages and struggles on its course. Coach believed that the purity of this struggle is the meaning of success, and purity means giving all one's mind, body, and heart to the practice of running.

None of this was unique to Coach or to the runners he attracted and trained. Wise men before him had taught that if we truly know one small thing through and through, we know all

things. But Coach didn't care for wise men before him, or for anything other than running. His passion itself was pure, and that passion was his blessing and his lesson and his gift to all he met.

In the spring of 1990, events unfolded and destiny swung its doors wide to bring young Coach to the little city of Hoboken, New Jersey. Hoboken is a square-mile patch of land tucked cozy between palisades and the Hudson River, across from the heart of Manhattan. From Hoboken, looking across the wide expanse of the Hudson, Manhattan looks like a castle rising above its moat. When the wind blows hard from the north, as it often does, the passing clouds make the castle even grander and more imposing in its granite stillness, and each day when the sun appears, the shadow of its central tower—the symbol of the Empire State—falls across the moat and wakes its humble neighbor with its shadowy spire.

It's tough for a little city to be in the shadow of a big one. It becomes a Cinderella in a way, doing a portion of the dirty work for the big sister. And Hoboken, with its factories and railroads and shipyards, did a lot of that dirty work over the years. But of all the hardworking cities and boroughs in the shadow of Manhattan, the Mile Square City was able to shine some stars of its own. Magic can happen beyond the spotlight, and the Gods often work their wonders in the wings.

When one enters Hoboken from the North, on the road that winds from the town of Weehawken, there is a sign—as there is at the limits of many proud, plucky places—that welcomes visitors and announces its claim to fame. Hoboken's sign, painted a clean white with cheerful blue lettering, says “Welcome to Hoboken—Birth Place of Baseball & Frank Sinatra.”

Hoboken is not just Beantown, the Halibut Capital or the Cucumber King. It's the birthplace of America's game, a game played without a clock, under a summer sky, a sky big enough to hold any dream. And Hoboken is the birthplace of one of America's great dreamers, a boy with teenage sass, adult bravado, and

old-age charm, who out of a modern cynicism in the wake of war still sang of love, of endless hope, and of even bigger dreams.

There's more to any town than what is printed on a sign, of course, just as there is more to a man's life than he can proclaim on a bumper sticker. Compared with Manhattan—the birthplace of much of America's history and of many great men—Hoboken's hard work and accomplishments may not seem like much. But for a scrappy little mile-square city, that sign said a lot.

When Coach arrived, he saw rising up—as if newborn—rows of brownstone apartments, bustling businesses, and busy streets. He did not see Hoboken's scrappy past. How could it have even existed before he arrived? Nor did he know then of its small claims to fame. What did any of that have to do with him? Coach had come to Hoboken to found a running club, and found a running club he would.

This is the story of Coach, of his club, of the runners who came to join it, and of the seemingly disparate events that led to what Coach would then view as their ultimate downfall. Children are beset with measles and mumps, the elderly with arthritis and gout, but it is our life in between—when our blood surges and we are pummeled by storms of passion—that is most dangerous. No man, and no plan of man—small successes notwithstanding—can hold strong against life and all its mystical forces—forces that can drive us from our own minds and lay waste to all our plans. Through the calmness, in the gentle turning of the seasons, there came rains of hope and snows of despair. Out of the quiet, through the darkness, there came phone calls in the night. From distant places, from times forgotten, they came with fears and dreams. Really, what chance did Coach have? Despite all of Coach's talent, hard work, and meticulous planning, his beloved Hoboken Harriers, and Coach himself, were finally undone, or so it seemed, by the trickiest, the most befuddling, and the most powerful life force of them all. This is the story of HOHAs in love.

EMMITT BEAN was the founder and coach of the Hoboken Harriers running club—or the HOHAs, as the club affectionately came to be known. Coach dreamed of a HOHAs cross-country championship, and he wanted it more than anything else in this life. But life rarely gives us what we want from it—it always gives us much, much more.

HOHAs in Love is the story of a dreamer, of the club he founded, and of the runners who joined him with dreams of their own. In their quest for their cherished championship, Coach and his star-crossed HOHAs unexpectedly discover that the lessons of running reveal the secrets of love.

6

“Back in the day, John Parker’s classic *Once a Runner* took us into the culture of elite track runners. Then there was *Born to Run* by Chris McDougall, an enthralling tale of the world’s best ultra-marathoners. Now we have Laurence Graham’s delightful, compelling story of competition, friendship and romance within a local running club. *HOHAs in Love* is a must read for anyone who has ever run a race or fallen in love.” —GEORGE A. HIRSCH, Chairman of New York Road Runners and former worldwide publisher of *Runner’s World*

“There are countless books about how to run a marathon or a faster 5K, but *HOHAs in Love* is the first book I’ve found that takes us inside a small running club and tells the story of our daily running lives. A wonderful novel about why we run, and more importantly, about why we run together.”

—MADELINE BOST, New Jersey Running Columnist



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