

Eddie, The Freshman Year

Chapter Five Winter Semester

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In addition to training with the track team, Eddie is also continuing his training at home. Since it is cooler out and the days are shorter, he does not have as many chances to ride his bicycle. On one particular Saturday, however, the temperature is in the high 60s, which is unusual for this time of year. He calls Mark, and asks if he wants to go on a ride to the beach. This is the perfect time for Mark to give his new bicycle a good test ride. Mark agrees, and Eddie gets ready to go. Packing a few pieces of fruit, water, and some amino acid supplements, Eddie rides to Mark's house.

When Eddie arrives, Mark is ready to go. Eddie, however, quickly points out to Mark that he is not ready to go. Eddie tells Mark to go inside, and get some food and water because he will need it once he gets to the beach. Mark heads back inside, and returns with some fruit and a few bottles of water. The cyclists head toward the parkway, and take the paved path to the beach. As they ride along the path, Eddie glimpses toward the portal, wondering if Mark would believe him if he told him about it. Eddie decides to save that discussion for another day.

Eddie and Mark are having a highly energetic ride. Surprising to Eddie, Mark is able to keep up reasonably well. Eddie and Mark alternate who is in the lead, giving each one a chance to set the pace. As they approach the beach entrance, Eddie takes the lead since he is more familiar with the area. When they come to the turnabout, which has an obelisk in the center of it, they make their way around the circle and go down the road to the left. A half mile down the road is a large parking lot, which they enter. At the end of the parking lot, there is a concession area. The concession area is closed because it is Winter. Between the parking lot and the road, there is an Olympic sized swimming pool for those who prefer swimming in fresh water. But, just like the concession area, the pool is also closed for the Winter.

Eddie and Mark get off their bicycles, and walk onto the nearly abandoned beach. Staring out at the ocean, Eddie asks Mark, “so, what do you think Mahoney does on a Saturday?” Mark replies, “sit on his ass and worry about Braden.” Eddie, recalling the 4 by 440 relay race during which Braden ran two legs, laughs, and says, “yeah. You’re probably right about that one.”

Looking over at the ocean, Eddie tells Mark, “if this were Summer, I’d be in the water right now.” Mark replies, “what about your bike? Where do you keep it?” Pointing to the concession stand at the end of the parking lot, Eddie tells Mark, “there’s a bike rack over there. It’s even bolted down. I just bring a lock.” Mark looks around at the ocean, the miles of beach, the pool, the concession stand, and compliments Eddie, telling him, “you got a really good setup here. It’s no wonder you’re always headed down to the beach.” Eddie remarks, “yeah. The only thing missing today are the girls.”

Eddie and Mark walk back up to the parking lot. Eddie asks Mark, pointing farther down the beach, “do you want to ride to the last parking lot up there, turn around, and head home?” Mark, not knowing or caring how far away the parking lot is, replies, “sure.” As they slowly ride down the road that parallels the beach, the sound of crashing waves relaxes the two riders. The last parking lot, which is a much smaller one with no amenities, turns out to be only two miles down the road.

Eddie and Mark stop in the parking lot and have their snack and drink some water. Eddie also takes his supplements, prompting Mark to ask, “what are those that you’re taking?” Eddie replies, “they’re my supplements, the amino acids. It’s for building muscle.” Mark, although he is curious, does not ask Eddie any other questions just yet. They turn around, and head down the road back to the beach entrance. At the entrance, they hang a right, and the relaxing part of the ride is over.

The ride home is the second part of the workout. Eddie tells Mark that the trip is about eleven miles each way. This is not a long distance for either of them to ride, but the workout is in the speed at which they ride. Riding up the path, an unofficial competition begins. Eddie, in the lead, speeds up, with Mark trying to keep up. Mark keeps up reasonably well, but the seasoned cyclist, Eddie, is faster. Eddie slows his pace, and lets Mark take the lead. Now it’s Mark’s turn. Eddie drafts behind Mark, conserving his energy at the expense of Mark’s.

At the end of the path, Eddie and Mark stop and chat for a while. Mark asks Eddie, “how do you keep up so easily?” Eddie tells Mark, “I draft off of you.” Mark asks, “you what?” Eddie replies, “I follow you closely, and it breaks the wind resistance. You do all the work, and I use less energy.” Mark mentions, “I wonder if that works in running too.” Serious,

but joking, Eddie replies, “yes, it does. But don’t tell Braden. He’s always out in front.”

Thinking more about the concept of drafting, Mark figures it out and suggests, “so, if we run close behind each other, especially in the distance races, and trade off the lead, we conserve energy.” Eddie replies, “yeah. And, you’ll run a better time. That’s why Mitchell is always running on someone’s heels in the mile. And that’s how he kicked Mahoney’s ass in the 880. So, Mitchell always lets the other runner set the pace, and burn out. Then, he has a lot left at the end, and wins the race.” Mark says to Eddie, “we have to tell everybody about this.” Eddie replies, “I thought everyone knew about drafting. We’ll have to spread the word.” Apparently not everyone knows, so the tribe may have just stepped up a notch or two in their skill level. Mark, who has always relied on brute strength and speed, now has added an important skill to his repertoire.

Mark and Eddie continue the short ride toward Mark’s house. As they approach Mark’s house, Mark heads up his driveway, and Eddie rides home. It’s a sure bet that Mark will be seen at the beach a lot more this next Spring and Summer. Riding a bicycle eleven miles to the beach is much easier and faster than running eleven miles. And, hanging out at the beach has the added benefit of being able to go into the water to cool off.

Monday’s track practice comes as usual after school, but with a surprise to the freshmen. Mr. Frazier announces that the meet next Saturday will be a 4-way meet, meaning four teams will be competing. The upperclassmen, who were on the team last year, are all too familiar with a 4-way meet. In a 4-way meet, the competition is always more challenging. Instead of one opposing team having one or two star runners in every event, there are three opposing teams, each with their own one or two star runners. It doesn’t take long to figure out that there will be a lot more losers than winners.

Mr. Frazier also mentions that, in most cases, the athletes will be running in two events, not three. The team will practice Monday through Thursday for the week before the meet. On Friday, the team will be allowed to rest, allowing for complete physical recovery before the big event. Fortunately, for the team, it is a home meet, so they will have the advantage of not having to wake up early and travel.

Everyone already knows who the opposing teams are because the meet schedule is published at the beginning of the season. Before practice one day, Eddie checks the schedule to remind himself who will be the opposition. On the list of schools that will be competing is Centerville High School. Eddie thinks to himself, “what was the deal with them last year?” Then it occurred to Eddie, thinking to himself, “oh, yeah.

McCrutchen. That guy again.” Eddie, headed to the locker room, intends to tell Mark.

In the locker room, Eddie finds Mark, who is talking with Braden. Announcing his entrance, Eddie says to Mark and Braden, “guess who’s back on Saturday?” Mark and Braden look at each other, at a loss to figure out whom Eddie is talking about. Eddie just tells them, “McCrutchen. One of the teams we’re up against is Centerville.” Mark grins, and says, “yeah. We worked him over good last year.” Braden throws a monkey wrench in the conversation, stating, “I wonder if he even made the team.” Mark comments, “he’d better be on the team. I want to mess with his mind some more.” Braden has no problem reminding everyone, “yeah, we kicked their ass big time last year, and we’re gonna do it again.”

After practice, Mr. Frazier calls a short team meeting and has the team sit on the bleachers. Mr. Frazier tells the team everything he could dig up regarding the opposition for the upcoming meet. As he is speaking, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara, the team assistants, walk down the metal staircase and sit with the team on the bleachers. Mr. Frazier tells the team, “Kathy, Paula, and Barbara will now talk to you. Pay very close attention to what they have to say.” Going through the events one by one, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara offer the names of some of the competitors, and what their best-known time is for each race. After going through the running events, they move on to the high jump and shot-put. When the girls are done, Mr. Frazier dismisses the team for the day.

As the team walks up the metal stairway to the hallway, Eddie turns to check out Kathy, Paula, and Barbara from a higher vantage point. With his eyes on the girls rather than where he is going, Eddie trips and stumbles into Mark, taking Mark, who is also checking out the scenery, down with him. Braden, following Eddie, trips over Eddie, causing a domino effect on the stairway. Mr. Frazier, not missing a beat, yells out to them, “you guys can definitely run, but it looks like you need a little help walking!” Mr. Frazier was clueless what caused the commotion, but everyone on the stairway knew.

In the locker room, Braden mentions to Eddie and Mark, “well, at least there’s one for each of you.” Eddie and Mark laugh off Braden’s comment, but Braden’s comment couldn’t be closer to the truth. Braden, not letting the moment pass, asks Eddie, “so who gets who?” Eddie replies, “I’ll take Kathy.” Mark, who is glad to hear that, replies, “okay, then. I’ll go with Paula.” Eddie then says to Braden, “well, bro, that leaves you with Barbara.” Braden, not missing a beat, replies, “I ain’t shopping. I still got Wendy.” Johnson pipes up and says, “remember, the coach said their job is to flirt,” which is apparently the only thing Johnson remembers about

the girls. Everyone eventually heads home, with a couple of new things to now think about this week.

Saturday morning arrives, and so do the busses transporting the competition, and a few spectators. Saturday morning track meets usually begin at 10:00 a.m., and are usually done by 1:00 p.m. As the teams arrive, some student volunteers direct them to the proper location.

Meanwhile, Mr. Frazier and the team assistants are going over some last minute details with the team. He reminds the team that, since this is a 4-way meet, there will be medals for the winners of each event. Medals issued for first, second, and third place are supposed to induce the runners to perform better. Some athletes, mostly seniors, have a nice collection of medals they've won over the last three years.

Getting around to a very important topic, Mr. Frazier addresses his team, "this is our first meet of the season. Last year, some of you, as always, delivered a stellar performance. Before we get out on the track today, I want you to hear something that we all need not forget. If you are a sophomore, junior, or senior, you have heard me say this before. Some of you need to hear it again. If you are a freshman, what I am about to tell you is very important."

Telling his team one of his favorite stories, Mr. Frazier explains, "many of you have heard me tell this before, but some of you need to hear it again. When I was in my early teens, one day it was very stormy outside. My father was watching a track meet on television. As most of you probably know, track was my sport, so I watched along with him. I remember that day very well, as if it were yesterday.

When my race, the 100-yard dash, came up, I watched what the runners did before they got into the blocks. I watched them as they were waiting for the gun. I watched very carefully when the gun went off and they left the blocks. And, I watched every step as they raced toward the finish line. I wanted to learn as much as I can."

Never hearing Mr. Frazier talk about his past before, Mr. Frazier now has Eddie's full attention. Braden, leaning forward with his arms resting on his thighs, is particularly interested in what his coach has to say. Mark, for once, is paying close attention and not messing with someone. Even some of the spectators who arrived early are listening to Mr. Frazier's presentation to his team.

Explaining to his team when he first learned that there is only one winner in any race, Mr. Frazier continues, "once the 100-yard dash was over, it was clear to my father and I which runner took first place. But, second and third place seemed to be a tie. While we were waiting to find

out who came in second and third place, I asked my father, 'who do you think came in second place?' My father turned to me, looked right in my eye, and said, 'George. It doesn't matter. They both lost. Only one person wins the race. Everyone else is a loser.' I told my father, 'but, they give medals for second and third place.' My father replied, 'so what. They still lost.'

That day, my father wanted to teach me a lesson, so he told me, 'George, go and get your Bible.' I went and got my Bible, and my father told me, 'open your Bible to First Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 24, and read it to me.' I read to him, 'Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you win.' My father looked me straight in the eye, and said to me, 'George, there is only one winner. Everyone else is a loser. It's that simple.' I saw a very deep conviction in his eyes when he told me that. Understand this! There is only one winner!

Now, listen to this. My father asked me, 'George, when you play football in school, and your team loses, do you go around boasting to everyone that your team came in second place?' Before I could even answer him, he yelled out, 'of course you don't! Second place is nothing to be proud of, especially if there are only two teams playing!'

Whether there are two, six, or twelve runners in the race, there is still only one winner! No one ever boasts about coming in second place! Mark my word! There is only one winner! Whoever comes in second place is the first loser! If you come in second place, learn from the situation, figure out what you need to improve, and do better next time!"

Summing up his presentation, Mr. Frazier concludes, "there is no reason why we can't win everything out there today. This is the first meet of the year. Word will get around the division very quickly about who the major contenders are. Word will also get around of who the losers are. You do not want to have the reputation of being a loser! Let's all get out there and win!" The team claps, gaining a renewed understanding about the importance of winning.

At the requisite starting time, all of the runners are in the arena, ready to go. The first event is the 40-yard dash. Since there are four teams, and each team is allowed to have three contestants, twelve runners will be competing. There will be two preliminary heats. The fastest six times will compete in the 40-yard dash final. Past performance determines whether a runner is in the first or second heat. As the coaches are discussing procedural issues, which they seem to do every year, Eddie spots McCutchen warming up. He points McCutchen out to Mark, who hopes to run against him in some event today.

Mr. Frazier walks over to his sprinters, and tells Eddie and Mark that they are in the first heat, and tells Johnson that he is in the second heat. Mr. Frazier tells Mark, Eddie, and Johnson, "don't let me down." That is all that the three sprinters need to hear in order to run a better race. The Meet Announcer tells all of the runners of the 40-yard dash to make their way to the starting line. The lane assignments for the preliminary heats are based upon qualifying times. Eddie is assigned to lane two, and Mark to lane four. McCutchen is not found among the sprinters.

As the runners get ready, the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, is complaining to one of the Timekeepers that the sprint is a 40-yard dash, not a 50 or 55-yard dash. Mr. Ruff makes this complaint every year. In Winter track, the sprint can be a 40-yard, 50-yard, 55-yard, or 60-yard dash, depending on the track size. Not to mention, the 40-yard dash happens to be the divisional standard. Mr. Ruff's complaining gets him nowhere, as one of the Timekeepers explains to him that it is a regulation track.

The Starter, who is the official that starts the races, makes the announcement, "on your marks." Ready to run in their first high school meet, Eddie and Mark are filled with adrenaline. They are both aware that this is now real competition. The Starter, with a long drawn out tone, announces, "set." Waiting for the buzzer, the runners are in the "set" position and are motionless. Time appears to stand still. The Starter hits the buzzer, and the runners are off.

All of the runners are quickly out of the blocks. A few steps out of the blocks, the runners are all approaching their top speed. At ten yards there is a clear leader, Eddie. He is followed closely by Mark. One step behind Mark are two runners that are head to head. At the halfway point, Eddie quickly realizes that this is no easy race. Although he is in first place, if he does not keep up his speed, or move faster, he could be easily overtaken. At 30 yards into the race, it appears that Eddie has the race wrapped up. Out of his peripheral vision, he sees a runner to his right gaining ground.

The last thing a runner wants to do is to turn his head to see who it may be. Turning your head during a sprint will cause you to slow your pace and run erratically, and perhaps lose your lead. Eddie, focused on the finish line, crosses first, followed very closely by Mark. After Mark, two runners cross at nearly the same time. The runners in fifth and sixth place are not too far behind, but will probably not make the final heat.

Wasting no time, the Meet Director tells the runners in the second heat to get ready. Eddie is watching the officials to see how they work together. He is looking for a way to anticipate the buzzer. He notices there are two officials operating the buzzers, one at the far end of the

track and one at the starting line. Eddie, near the finish line, watches the runners as they get ready. He sees Johnson in lane four. The Starter at the starting line announces, "on your marks," as Eddie watches intently. The Starter then announces, "set." Off to the side of the track, the Starter fixes his gaze at the runners. Once the runners are set, he nods his head. Eddie hears the buzzer go off, but the Starter at the starting line did not move his foot to operate the buzzer. Eddie surmises that the nod of the head signals the other Starter to hit the buzzer while the one at the starting line looks for a false start. If there is a false start, the Starter at the starting line would hit his foot switch, sounding the buzzer a second time. Eddie decides he would watch this more closely the next chance he got.

Meanwhile, during Eddie's deep thought, Johnson just came in second place in his heat. Eddie, Mark, and Johnson exchange high-fives, and will be in the final heat. As the attention turns toward the 4 by 220 relay race, the group heads back to the team bench to watch that event.

After some discussion between the Timekeepers, the Meet Announcer declares the results, "competing in the 100-yard dash final, Edward Bogenskaya, 4.5 seconds. Mark Svoboda, 4.55 seconds. Lucius Clay, 4.6 seconds. Alan Williams, 4.8 seconds. John Brady, 4.6 seconds. Eric Johnson, 4.7 seconds." With his three sprinters in the final, Mr. Frazier could not be more pleased with the results.

Mark asks Mr. Frazier, "how did I get a 4.55?" Mr. Frazier explains to Mark, "Eddie got a 4.5, third place got a 4.6, so they assign the guy between them, you, a 4.55." Mark is not accustomed to a race where less than a tenth of a second potentially determines the winner and loser. When in middle school, Mark usually beat his competition in the 100-yard dash by several tenths of a second.

During the 4 by 220 relay event, Kathy, one of Mr. Frazier's team assistants, comes up to Eddie, and says to him, "so, you're Eddie?" Eddie simply replies, "yeah. That's me." Kathy tells Eddie, "that was a really good race you ran." Eddie, not used to the attention, tells Kathy, "yeah, but it's not over yet. There's still the final." Looking at her clipboard, Kathy tells Eddie, "you have the best time today." Eddie sees on Kathy's clipboard that the winner of the other heat ran a 4.6. Quickly flipping the page, Kathy looks at her stopwatch, and writes something down as Mahoney passes the baton to the next runner.

Kathy mentions to Eddie, "Mahoney's having a bad day." Eddie tells Kathy, "I don't really talk to him much." Kathy giggles, and tells Eddie, "that's because he doesn't like you. You're running his events. You're faster than he is, and he doesn't like it." Eddie, without thinking about what he is about to say, tells Kathy, "using Mahoney's logic, no one here

should like me because I'm the fastest one here." Eddie thinks to himself, "wow! Did I just say that?" Attracted to Eddie's confidence, Kathy tells him, "I'll have my eyes on you the whole time during the final." Touching Eddie on his arm, Kathy warmly says to him, "good luck," as she goes about her team duties.

At the end of the relay, Kathy confers with Mr. Frazier, and records the team's time. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara, each with several stopwatches hanging from their necks, also record the other team's approximate split and composite times. With the efforts of his three team assistants, Mr. Frazier has all the statistics he needs going into future competitions. Unknown to the other coaches, Mr. Frazier is running a high-tech organization.

The next event is the mile. Each team is allowed three runners, making for a crowded field on the 220-yard track. Following the one-mile run will be the 40-yard dash final. The position of the 40-yard dash final within the order of events varies from meet to meet, with the coaches coming to a consensual agreement. This is because the finalists are scheduled for other events, and no coach wants their runners in back-to-back races. More so than the coaches, the runners also do not want to be in back-to-back events.

While the mile is underway, Eddie walks toward the starting line for the 40-yard dash. While he is walking, he catches Kathy glancing his way, smiling at him when he catches her eye. Mark, already at the starting line, asks Eddie, "are you ready?" Eddie replies to Mark, "more than ever." Eddie sees Johnson headed their way. With six runners in the final, four of them were from Eddie's heat, and two from Johnson's.

Once the mile is completed, all eyes are on the 40-yard dash. The two Starters operating the buzzers move into position. The lanes are assigned to the finalists by another official. Eddie is in lane four, Mark in lane two, and Johnson in lane six. The better qualifying times are usually assigned the inside lanes. There is also an unofficial rule to not place runners on the same team next to each other if possible. At the finish line, there are two officials with Polaroid cameras, to get a photo of the finish. This will give objective evidence in the event of a very close race.

Eddie, looking down the track, sees Kathy, looking right at him. Eddie remembers what she said a while ago, which is that she would have her eyes on him the whole time. Mark walks over to Eddie, and whispers to him, "the guy in lane three has the best time of the competitors. I'm going to mess with his head." The Starter asks the runners if they are ready. Everyone indicates that they are, and get in position behind their blocks.

The Starter then announces, “on your marks.” The runners position themselves in the blocks. When they are almost in position, Mark says to the runner in lane three, “I thought you told him you were ready.” A split second after Mark’s comment, the Starter announces, “set.” Somewhat distracted, the runner in lane three turns his head and looks at Mark. Mark whispers to the runner in lane three, “your shoelaces.” Taking Mark’s advice, the runner in lane three examines his shoelaces. Eddie, meanwhile, has his eyes fixed on the Starter at the other end of the track. With the runner in lane three physically set, but not mentally ready to run, the buzzer sounds.

Eddie, as he saw the Starter’s foot move, was out of the blocks first. The runner in lane three, who was distracted by Mark, was clearly out of the blocks last. This is the runner that had a time close to Eddie’s during the qualifying heats. His slowness out of the blocks, which came as a great surprise, is noticed by all who are watching. Leaving the blocks last on a 40-yard race is a sure sign you will lose, for there is not sufficient distance to make up any lost time.

At ten yards, Eddie and Mark are nearly tied, with Eddie having a slight lead. A group of three runners, which includes Johnson, are a few steps behind. The guy in lane three, who was distracted by Mark, is in last place. Eddie, remembering he told Kathy that he is the fastest person in the arena, must now deliver on his claim. Eddie, somehow finding some extra energy, is beginning to take a slightly greater lead over Mark.

Halfway through the race, Eddie is clearly ahead. Mark, however, is still very close behind. Johnson is still in the middle of the pack of three. The runner in lane three is catching up to the pack, but is too far behind to catch the leaders. At 30 yards, Eddie will be the clear winner. It appears Mark will take second place. Third place, however, cannot be called with ten yards remaining. Eddie, who is too focused on the race, does not see Kathy, just beyond the finish line, watching his every step.

At the finish line, Eddie, knowing he has ran his fastest race ever, crosses the line first. Mark crosses second, a mere one yard behind Eddie. When the next group of runners approach the finish line, third place is too close to call. As the runners cross the line, several flashes go off to catch it on film. The last place runner, three yards behind the photo finish crowd, finally crosses the finish line more than one second after Eddie.

The officials meet, examining the photographic evidence to find out who has earned third place. Some of the coaches want to see the photos, which they will, but won’t be able to until after third place is called.

Meanwhile, the guy who ran in lane three, distracted before the race by Mark, has some words to exchange. The lane three guy alleges to Mark, "you screwed up the whole race, you idiot! It needs to be run over." Mark simply tells the guy, "hey, it ain't my fault you can't run. Maybe you should practice sometime." Mark's comment did not sit well with the lane three guy, who tells Mark, "yeah, well, I'll kick your ass." Mark laughs quite audibly, and responds, "yeah, right. I'd love to see that." The lane three guy walks away, knowing that Mark has beaten him three times. Once before the race, again during the race, and finally, after the race. The officials and coaches were too busy waiting to see who got third place to notice the exchange between Mark and the loser of the race.

The officials have made their decision. The coaches are now allowed to examine the photos. After careful examination of the results, none of the coaches object. Separating third and fourth place is only a few inches, which is common in this type of race. The Head Timekeeper takes the pleasure of declaring the final times. He announces, "Edward Bogenskaya, 4.4 seconds. Mark Svoboda, 4.5 seconds. Lucius Clay, 4.6 seconds. Eric Johnson, 4.65 seconds. Alan Williams, 4.65 seconds. John Brady, 5.1 seconds." Paying close attention is Brady, who now knows the name of his new opponent, both on the track and off. Paying close attention to Eddie is Kathy, who congratulates Eddie for his awesome victory.

Next up for Eddie is the 4 by 440 relay. The 4 by 440 relay is always the last event to be run. This is because the best runners are usually assigned to this relay race. Scheduling the race last gives the runners the most time to recover from their other events. For now, the attention is turned to another relay, the mile medley, which is owned by the veterans this year. In the mile medley, there are two legs of 220 yards, one leg of 440 yards, and one leg of 880 yards. Mahoney gets the pleasure of running the 880-yard leg of this race.

Eddie, however, pays absolutely no attention to the mile medley relay. Taking a seat on the bench to rest for a while, he has his first chance to observe what is happening as a spectator. Eddie hears the coaches telling the runners to run faster. Being a runner himself, he can assure the coaches that the runners are running as fast as they can. He can equally assure the coaches that the runners don't hear them screaming because they are too focused on running the race. Eddie also sees no less than three dozen people with stopwatches. One of them is Kathy, who seems to be paying more attention to Eddie on the bench than the race. Eddie catches Kathy looking in his direction a couple of times, and each time she is smiling.

Eddie is joined by Mark, Braden, and Johnson, who have all completed their individual events for the day. Braden tells the group, "I won the 440! I took first, second, and third place!" Braden was joking, for he only took

first place. Mark points out to Braden, “the only way you can do that, bro, is if you’re the only one in the race.” Braden thinks about that for a second, and fires back, “I am the only one in the race! No one can beat me!” They all have a laugh at Braden’s comeback. Johnson mentions to his buddies, “I got second place in the 220. Some of these guys are fast.”

While they are having their conversation, Kathy walks up to the 4 by 440 relay team. Showing them what is on her clipboard, she tells them, “your race is after this one. This is what you’ll be up against.” Kathy also mentions, “the times next to their names are not exact. But, the times are their best as far as we know.” As they look over the list, Mark points to a line and says, “McCrutchen again. So, that’s where they put him.” Eddie also sees another name who is familiar to Mark. Eddie points to the runner’s name, and says, “yeah, and there’s Brady, from the 40-yard dash.” Kathy adds some valuable information, informing the 4 by 440 relay team, “the good news is Brady can only run a 60-second quarter mile, and that’s on a good day.”

Braden asks, “do we know what order they go in?” Kathy, who acquired the information earlier, replies, “the order on the list is the order they go in.” Braden, the lead man, will be up against McCutchen and Brady. Mark asks Kathy, “can we change our order?” Braden interjects, asking, “why?” Mark replies, “it’s not every day that I’ll get to kick McCutchen’s and Brady’s ass in one race.” Kathy tells Mark, “you’d have to ask Mr. Frazier about that.” Kathy tells the team, “good luck,” placing her hand gently on Eddie’s back as she walks away.

The relay team approaches Mr. Frazier to see if they can change the order. Mark asks, “Mr. Frazier, can we change our order in the race?” Mr. Frazier replies, “what do you mean?” Mark asks Mr. Frazier, “can I be the lead man, and Braden the anchor?” Mr. Frazier asks the expected question in the form of a statement, “tell me why.” Mark explains, “McCrutchen and Brady are the lead men for the other teams. I want to kick both of their asses at once, in one race!” Mr. Frazier smiles and laughs, and replies, “sure, go ahead. But, you’d better kick their ass!”

Mr. Frazier explains to Braden, “hold the baton, and give it to Mark right before the race begins.” Mark curiously asks, “why?” Mr. Frazier tells Mark, “they can make last minute changes as well, so you don’t want to give them the chance.” Mr. Frazier’s reaction to their request was priceless. He also raised the energy level of the relay team, who is now even more fired up.

The officials tell the runners of the 4 by 440 relay teams to prepare for the final event. The teams meet at the starting line, with Braden holding the baton. Also holding batons are McCutchen and the veteran Brady. As McCutchen, Brady, and some unknown guy from Madison High School all

enter the track, Braden tosses the baton to Mark, who also enters the track. Mark points to McCutchen's shoes, invoking a little déjà vu in his mind. McCutchen remembers Mark well from last year's meet. Mark also points to Brady with his baton, and stares right into his eyes. Mark knows from Kathy that Brady can only run 440 yards in the lower 60-second range. Mark's display of playfulness, confidence, and a relaxed attitude can only distract the opponents.

The Starter tells the runners, "on your marks." The runners get into position. The next command seems like it is delayed. Sure enough, McCutchen is not positioned yet, and is checking his shoelaces. The Starter announces, "set." With the runners ready to go, the buzzer sounds. Mark leaves the starting blocks with enough speed to convince everyone he has something to prove.

Casually looking at the runners, it is clear that Mark is in the lead. In second place is Brady, who has a score to settle. McCutchen, in third place, has many scores to settle with Mark. After the first lap, at 220 yards, Mark is clearly ahead of the other three runners. For the remainder of the first leg, the relative position of the runners remains the same, but the gap between each runner widens. Brady is desperately trying to catch Mark during the last lap, but simply can't. Mark passes the baton to Johnson, and leaves the track, returning to the starting point to join the other runners.

After Brady and McCutchen leave the track, they also return to the starting point. Brady looks at Mark, and has no words to say this time. Braden, however, has words for everyone to hear. Braden, giving Mark a high-five, impulsively blurts out, "you kicked their ass, big time!" McCutchen gets up the nerve to say to the tribe, "the race ain't over yet." Braden, reassuring everyone around, exclaims, "oh yeah, it is! It was over when it started!"

Back on the track, Johnson is maintaining a solid lead. After the first lap is completed, the runner on McCutchen's team passes the runner on Brady's team. This is not good news for Johnson, for he is next on the runner's list to be passed. On the back straightaway of the last lap, the runner is gaining on Johnson but, with about 100 yards to go, Johnson sprints to the transition zone. Johnson delivers the baton to Eddie, and is the first runner in his leg to complete the transition.

Eddie leaves the transition zone running with the same speed with which he won the 40-yard dash. Eddie widens his lead over the other runners, who seem to be bunching up halfway through the leg. Another positional change occurs between Riverdale and Centerville, but all attention is focused on Eddie. With the rest of the weekend to recover, Eddie sprints the last 100 yards. With Braden in his sites, Eddie hands off

the baton, quickly looking back to see where the other runners are. Eddie knew, when he saw the runner in second place just coming out of the curve, the race has already been wrapped up.

Just as Eddie joins his other team members, Brady asks Eddie, “where did you guys come from? We haven’t seen you before.” Brady, a senior, does not remember Eddie, Mark, Braden, or Johnson from any previous meets. Mark, deciding to be the spokesman for the group, answers, telling Brady, “we’re freshmen. This is our first meet. It was good practice.” McCutchen, a little distance away, is eavesdropping on their conversation. McCutchen mumbles to a teammate, “four more years of this shit to come. Oh wonderful.”

Braden, with a comfortable lead, is taking no chances. He remembered Mr. Frazier told him to “kick their ass”. Well, Mr. Frazier told the whole team to kick their ass, but kicking ass is somehow Braden’s specialty. On the back straightaway, it becomes apparent that Braden has more than a 100-yard lead, or greater than ten seconds. After the first lap, Mr. Frazier knows Braden has the race all wrapped up.

As Braden is on his last lap, Kathy tells Eddie, “all of you ran a sub-60! It looks like Axel Braden will too.” Eddie asks Kathy, “what was my time?” Kathy replies, “you can’t tell exactly because of the handoff, but it was definitely in the 54-second range.”

The focus shifts toward the finish line as Braden comes around the final curve. Braden crosses the finish line while the runner who is in second place is still in the final curve. In second place is Riverdale, which is Brady’s team. They are followed by Centerville, which is McCutchen’s team. In last place, from Madison High, is a relay team that ran as if it was the first relay race they’ve ever ran together.

With the meet now over, the officials make the announcement regarding the final score. Mr. Frazier is ecstatic when he hears his team won the meet, but he suspected that would be the case halfway through the meet. The Meet Announcer instructs the spectators to move to the sides of the bleachers, opening up the center area for the runners. The official then tells the teams to have a seat on the bleachers for the awards ceremony. In just a few minutes, the winners will receive their medals. With more than 125 athletes in the arena, it takes several minutes to get everyone where they should be.

Standing behind the podium, the Meet Announcer addresses the runners, saying, “when I call your name, I want you to walk up to your coach, and receive your medal. You will stand behind your coach after you receive your award.” The group of athletes standing behind their coach is the coach’s reward for the meet. To both the left and right of the

podium stand two coaches, spread out in the center of the oval track. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara stand with Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde to the far left side of the oval.

The official begins the announcements. "In the 40-yard dash, first place goes to Edward Bogenskaya. Come up please." Eddie walks up to Mr. Frazier, as an official hands the medal to Mr. Frazier. He continues calling the names of the winners, "in second place, Mark Svoboda, and in third place, Lucius Clay." The Meet Clerk distributes the medals to the appropriate coach.

The Meet Announcer then tells the coaches, "you may now drape the medals." Mr. Frazier hands the first place medal to Kathy. Simultaneously, Kathy drapes Eddie and Mr. Frazier drapes Mark. Some people notice that Kathy does a little more than draping the medal around Eddie's neck. She places her hands gently on his shoulders, and is very slow to remove them. The runners then stand behind Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, and their three team assistants. Mark whispers to Eddie, "bro, she likes you."

As the awards continue, Mr. Frazier's group is getting to be, by far, the largest. By the time the medals are to be distributed for the 4 by 440 relay event, Eddie's entire tribe is behind Mr. Frazier. Bobby B. placed third in the shot-put. Mitchell placed second in the 880-yard run and placed second in the mile. Johnson placed second in the 220-yard dash. Braden placed first in the 440-yard dash, letting everyone in the arena know that he won the gold medal in that event. This is not bad for freshmen, who were competing against mostly juniors and seniors. As for the rest of the team, the majority of the Northside track athletes are now standing behind the Northside coaches.

The official then announces the result of the 4 by 440 relay, "in first place, for Northside, Axel Braden, Eric Johnson, Edward Bogenskaya, and Mark Svoboda," which was the order in which they were supposed to run. With everyone looking at the bleachers waiting for the winners to come forward, the relay team, each already decorated with a medal, steps out from behind Mr. Frazier. The official announces the second and third place winners of the event. Second place goes to Riverdale, and third place to Centerville.

The official instructs the coaches to drape the medals. Mr. Frazier hands one medal to Barbara, one to Paula, one to Kathy, and keeps one for himself to drape. He then tells the girls, "pick somebody," referring to a runner to drape. It did not take much time for Kathy to end up standing behind Eddie again. Kathy got behind Eddie so fast, it's a wonder that she's not on the track team herself. Mr. Frazier and his assistants proudly drape the four runners.

With the meet now over, the winners shake the hands of their opponents. The center of the oval track serves as the winner's circle. Eddie and his tribe mingle with the crowd for a few minutes. Some of the runners who are on the bleachers come down to congratulate the winners. After a while, the crowd thins out, and the visiting teams head to their busses.

On the back row of the bleachers, watching the meet, was Mr. Moreno, the football coach. Mr. Moreno was more interested in looking for a potential running back, wide receiver, or free safety than in the outcome of the meet. During the 4 by 440 relay, Mr. Moreno was visualizing the runners running with a football rather than a baton. He had his own clipboard, and was silently taking names. Mr. Moreno quietly slips out of the arena, unnoticed by all.

Eddie and his tribe have their own celebration in the locker room. This was their first big meet, and each of them walked away with at least one medal. Braden, showing off his medals, exclaims, "I finally got some proof that I kicked ass!" Bobby B., who took third place in the shot-put, is very excited. Mark comments, "imagine what it'll be like when we're seniors." A comment is then heard around the corner in the locker room, "if you ever get to be seniors." Eddie looks around the corner, as Mark asks, "who said that?" Eddie looks around the corner again, pretending not to know the team member making the comment, replies, "I don't know who he is." Mark, looking around the corner, says, "I think that's Mahoney." Eddie, getting Mark's drift, questions Mark and everyone else, "oh, so that's Mahoney?" Eddie and Mark have been ignoring Mahoney, and pretending not to know who he is. Mahoney has not learned that messing with the tribe is something you just don't do.

The locker room eventually empties out, and everyone goes home to have lunch and a relaxing afternoon. Eddie and Mark, who rode their bicycles to the meet today, ride home together. As Eddie and Mark ride down the parking lot to the road, Kathy comes out of the front of the school hoping to find Eddie and talk with him for a while. She has been hanging out in the hallway, waiting for Eddie to come out of the locker room.

Seeing Eddie off in a distance, riding away, Kathy is deeply saddened because she really wanted to see him. What she didn't know is that Eddie's and Mark's bicycles were locked up in the locker room, and Eddie and Mark left out of the back door near the gym. Her next chance to see Eddie will be Monday morning, if she can even find him before practice. Kathy starts her walk home alone, thinking all about today's meet on the way.

As Monday arrives, word gets around school that the team did well in the track meet. The wrestling team also had a good meet this weekend, with Gump beating his opponent in under a minute. After school today, Mr. Frazier will go over the meet, and again congratulate the winners. But, in the meantime, it's back to academics. During every class change, Kathy searches the halls for Eddie to at least say "hi," but has no such luck today. Being a sophomore, Kathy's classes aren't usually in the same area of the school as Eddie's.

After school, it's back to track practice for the team. Once the team is assembled in the arena, Mr. Frazier instructs them to have a seat on the bleachers. Eddie, and his tribe, sits near the end, closest to the metal stairway. Mr. Frazier, addressing the team, begins, "we had an awesome meet this weekend! I want to bring your attention to a few items. The first is in the individual events. We took more gold and silver medals than any of the other teams! And, we took more medals overall than all the other teams combined! I am proud of every single one of you!"

As Mr. Frazier continues speaking, Kathy, Barbara, and Paula walk down the metal stairway. Barbara walks up to Mr. Frazier and hands him a piece of paper, as Kathy and Paula have a seat on the bleachers. Kathy takes a seat next to Eddie, with Paula joining her. Mr. Frazier continues, "Barbara has given me a list with your approximate split times in the relay races." Mr. Frazier gives the team some interesting news, revealing, "the first thing I want to address regarding the relays is that some of your handoffs need a little work. So, that's what many of you will be working on today." He then continues, "now for your times. In the mile medley, Bell, your 220 was about 32 seconds, not bad." Mr. Frazier continues announcing the split times, with everyone listening for their name.

While Mr. Frazier continues to announce the times, Kathy places her hand on Eddie's thigh, whispering to him, "don't worry. Your times were seriously awesome, and Mr. Frazier has some good news for you!" Bell, who is seated in the row behind Eddie, but a little farther down, catches a glimpse of Kathy placing her hand on Eddie's thigh. Bell whispers to Mahoney, "he's already got your events. Now, he's going after the girl you like." Mahoney looks to his left, and turns about as red as a ripe tomato. Kathy, knowing what is on the paper that Barbara gave to Mr. Frazier, whispers to Eddie, "here's your time coming up now." Mahoney, catching a glimpse of the whisper, can only presume what Kathy whispered in Eddie's ear.

Mr. Frazier then announces, "and, in the 4 by 440 relay, everyone ran a sub-60 second time!" He then gives the approximate times, "Mark, you ran a 54. Johnson, you ran a 55. Eddie, a 53. A 53! Can you believe it? And Braden, you ran a 54." Mr. Frazier tells the team, "Braden said this

team was going to kick ass, and they delivered! I'm very, very proud of this relay team!"

Mr. Frazier finishes by making the announcement, "in eight weeks, there will be a State level competition in the coliseum." He gives some further details, telling the team, "in order to be invited to this meet, you must first qualify. In order to qualify, you must simply deliver a qualifying time." A qualifying time is defined by the sport organizers, which is usually somewhere in the upper three percentile, based upon the statistics for the last few years. Then, Mr. Frazier gives some good news, exclaiming, "some of you have already qualified!" Kathy whispers again in Eddie's ear, "that's the good news I was telling you about. You're going to the State invitational meet." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "wow! I wasn't expecting that!" Eddie's whisper to Kathy does not go unnoticed by Mahoney.

Mr. Frazier then tells the team to stretch and take a warm-up lap before practice begins. During the warm-up lap, Mahoney runs up next to Eddie and gives him a warning, telling him, "stay away from Kathy. She's mine." Eddie replies to the buffoon, "shut up, loser. The only thing that's yours is last place." Eddie starts running faster, not wanting to listen to Mahoney's babbling. Mahoney chases him, trying to prove that he is not a loser, but is unable to catch Eddie.

After the warm-up lap, Mr. Frazier assigns everyone to a group, and gives them their workout drills for today. Kathy, Barbara, and Paula will be helping Mr. Frazier with today's practice. They will be recording times, and working with the runners, giving them some ideas to help improve their performance. With so many qualifiers and the State invitational meet coming up, Mr. Frazier wants the best team he can deliver.

Mahoney, whose best performance this past weekend was third place in the mile medley relay, is assigned to a group that will be working on their handoffs. Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson are assigned to a group that will be running sprints for time. Mitchell will be running nonstop for the next hour with the other distance men. Bobby B. will head up the metal staircase to the weight room, joining the others in the shot-put event.

Mr. Frazier assigns each one of the three girls to work with a particular group. Mr. Frazier, himself, will be working with the runners who need help with their handoffs, since he is an expert in this area. Mr. Frazier assigns Kathy to work with the sprinters. Barbara, being a distance runner herself, will be working with the distance runners. Paula, who is new to the team of assistants, will be trading off between helping both Kathy and Mr. Frazier.

Mr. Frazier instructs Kathy to work on getting the runners to improve their start out of the blocks. Two things are important when running a sprint. The first is getting out of the blocks as fast as possible. The second is getting to your top speed as fast as possible, preferably in less than four steps after leaving the blocks. These two factors are often the difference between first and second place. Today, Kathy will be reviewing with the sprinters how to accomplish that goal.

Kathy has the sprinters prepare as if they are going to run a sprint. She picks six of the runners, and tells them to pick a lane. Included in the six are Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden. Kathy explains, "the drill is to only run ten yards after the buzzer sounds. Me and Paula will be watching to see who is the fastest out of the blocks." Paula is equipped with a Polaroid camera to document each of the runner's start. Kathy also tells the runners, "Mr. Frazier says you should be at your top speed three or four steps out of the blocks."

The runners are in their lanes and ready to go. Kathy announces, "on your marks," followed by, "set." After sounding the buzzer, the runners are out of the blocks as fast as they are able. Simultaneously, Paula snaps a photograph just after the buzzer goes off. The runners run ten yards, as Kathy makes a note of who was ahead at five yards. After the photograph is ready, Kathy and Paula are ready for the next group. The next group steps up to the blocks, and performs the same drill. Gathering around Paula as she is holding the photograph, the runners can easily see who was out of the blocks fast and who was not.

Eddie's group gets another turn. But, before they perform the drill, Kathy will explain the proper foot placement in the blocks. Calling Eddie to step up to the blocks, Kathy will use him for an example. Kathy explains to the group, "the position of the front starting block should be one-and-a-half to two times the length of your shoe from the starting line." Telling Eddie to get in the "set" position, Kathy adjusts the front block to Eddie's optimal position. Kathy tells the runners, "when it's your turn, memorize the setting on the front starting block, and don't forget it."

Kathy then tells the group that the position of the rear block depends on the height of the runner, which is generally two-and-one-half feet to three feet from the starting line. Kathy, holding onto Eddie's rear leg, adjusts the rear block to his optimal setting. Kathy tells the runners, "the front leg should be bent to 90 degrees at your knee, and the back leg should be at 120 degrees when you are in the 'set' position." She tells the runners, "when it's your turn, you will look at the setting of the rear block, and memorize that number too."

The last things Kathy checks for are that Eddie's hands are three inches in front of his shoulders and three inches outside of his shoulders, and that his waist is bent at 45 degrees. Kathy comes over to Eddie, and places his hands in the correct position, which may have been a fraction of an inch off. Eddie's hands were actually in the correct position, but Kathy seems to be giving Eddie a lot of extra attention today.

Meanwhile, watching Eddie and Kathy carefully from the oval track is Mahoney, who is performing relay drills. Mahoney, who is about to receive the baton, has his eyes fixed on Kathy positioning Eddie's hands rather than the runner behind him. Next to Mahoney is another runner, also about to receive a baton. Mahoney, still looking at Kathy with her hands on Eddie, catches the runner about to handoff to him in his peripheral vision. Mahoney then comes back to reality, and realizes he should have started running a second or two ago.

As Mahoney starts running, the runner handing off has to drastically slow his pace, and trips over Mahoney during the delivery. They both go down on the track, taking down with them two other runners who were also in the middle of a handoff. With four runners down on the track, Mr. Frazier blows his whistle. Mr. Frazier, who saw exactly what happened, is not too happy at the moment.

Back at the sprinting drills, everyone turns to see what happened. Mark, who usually has some interesting commentary, states the obvious, saying, "well, that didn't go exactly as planned." Braden replies, "yeah, I'd say. There's Mahoney and Ambrosini thinking like they're playing a game of Kill the Man with the Baton." The runners lay on the track for a while, and are slow to get up.

Kathy instructs Eddie to get ready again, making sure he is properly positioned. She tells Eddie, "on your marks," which he already is. She then tells Eddie, "set." With Eddie perfectly positioned, Kathy sounds the buzzer, and Eddie leaves the blocks. After sprinting ten yards, he returns to the starting line. Kathy asks Eddie, "do you notice any difference?" Eddie replies, "yeah! Big time! I'm definitely out of the blocks faster and stronger." Kathy then tells the group, "it also looked like Eddie may have been up to his top speed faster."

Kathy tells the group, "I want the first group to set the blocks using the information I just went over. Paula and I will help you. Then, we'll run another drill." Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden, who are in the first group, get ready for the drill. Kathy and Paula help each runner with their optimal block position. Once everyone has their blocks set, Kathy tells them to memorize their block settings.

When they are ready, Kathy announces, “on your marks.” She then announces, “set.” Once everyone thinks they are in the “set” position, Kathy checks all the runners, making sure they are actually in their optimal position. After sounding the buzzer, the runners are all out of the blocks. Paula snaps another photograph after the buzzer goes off. The runners run their requisite ten yards and return to the starting line. Kathy asks, “okay, now! How was that?” Everyone agrees that they were able to leave the blocks a little faster and stronger. Kathy tells the runners, “check your blocks and make sure you have your setting numbers memorized.” She then goes through the procedure with the rest of the sprinters.

Kathy takes Paula aside, telling her, “it looks like Mark needs a little extra help with the blocks.” Paula, who seems quite naive, tells Kathy, “actually, it looks like he’s doing really good.” Kathy, whispering to Paula, explains to her, “he’s looking more at you than the blocks, or anything else. Don’t you see it?” Paula responds, “I just thought he was paying attention to what we were telling them.” Kathy, again explaining the facts to Paula, whispers, “yeah, he’s paying attention, all right. To you! He knows how to run. That’s obvious. He doesn’t need much help in that area.” Paula finally concedes, and tells Kathy, “okay, I’m going to watch him and see.”

While the other sprinters are getting set up, Eddie thinks back to the meet this past weekend. No one really paid too much attention to the way their blocks were set up. Many of the runners, Eddie recalls, just used the blocks where they were already positioned. He also wonders how Kathy knows so much about the art of sprinting. Eddie, who previously relied on pure strength and speed, quickly realizes that sprinting is a little more complicated than he originally thought.

At the end of practice, Mr. Frazier has the team sit on the bleachers. As usual, he goes over the good and the bad. The good news today is that the sprinters have all improved their starts. Mr. Frazier, after examining the photographic evidence, announces, “it looks like Eddie, Mark, and Braden are the fastest out of the blocks.” Mr. Frazier also tells the team, “Mitchell, it looks like you’re ready to run a marathon.” Today, Mr. Frazier has an abundance of good news and compliments for the team.

The only bad news the runners heard is about the relay handoffs. Mr. Frazier announces, “some of you still need a little help with your handoffs.” He then mentions, “and, Mahoney! Make sure you have collision insurance next time you get on the track!” Everyone laughs at Mr. Frazier’s comment, except for Mahoney, of course. Mr. Frazier, however, did not say this to be funny, but to make sure that a collision

like that never happens again. Mr. Frazier dismisses the team, and they all head to the locker room.

As Eddie leaves the locker room, he walks toward the front door of the school. Kathy is sitting on a bench in the school lobby waiting for him. Kathy, standing up and walking with him, says, "that was a really good workout." Eddie replies, "yeah. I learned a lot today. You're really good." Kathy softly asks Eddie, "are you headed home?" Eddie replies, "yeah. I'm walking today." Hoping that was the case, Kathy replies, "I'll walk with you."

Today, Kathy finally gets her time alone with Eddie. As Eddie and Kathy walk out together, Kathy asks Eddie, "okay, now. I have to ask. You're a freshman, and you're faster than all the seniors. How is that? What's up?" Eddie, who wasn't even sure he'd make the track team, answers, "I don't know. I ride my bicycle a lot, work out, and take some vitamins. I have some weights at home, a bench, and a squat rack that I sort of built myself." Kathy tells Eddie, "wow! You'll have to show it to me sometime." It is clear to anyone, just by looking at Kathy's body, that she also works out.

Kathy, who is getting really interested, asks Eddie, "where do you ride your bicycle to?" Eddie replies, "well, over the Summer, I ride to the beach a couple of times during the week." Kathy exclaims, "wow! That's like a long ride!" Eddie replies, "it's only eleven miles. It's really not too far." Also liking the beach, Kathy tells Eddie, "I really like the beach too, but I never thought about riding my bicycle there." Eddie asks, "do you ride a lot?" Kathy replies, "mostly to get to my friend's houses." Eddie and Kathy have a nice conversation on their way home.

Kathy's house, which is around the corner from Bobby B., is on the way to Eddie's house. When they arrive at Kathy's house, Kathy tells Eddie, "well, this is my stop." Before she goes inside, Eddie asks Kathy, "do I get to know the last name of the girl I just walked home?" Kathy replies, "oh, yeah. Well, um, to start with, my real name is not Kathy." Eddie asks the obvious, "wow! Then, what is your name?" Kathy replies, "Katarina Karakova." Pausing for a moment, Eddie repeats to Kathy, "Katarina Karakova. Wow! That's the most beautiful name I've ever heard!" Giving Eddie a hug, Kathy leaves absolutely no mistake about her level of interest in him. She expresses to Eddie, "I've enjoyed our walk. See you tomorrow?" Eddie replies, "yeah. That would be really nice, Katarina Karakova." Kathy smiles, gives Eddie another hug, and walks up to her house. Eddie continues walking home, thinking that high school has just gotten a lot better.

The next day before school starts, Kathy, sitting on a bench in the school lobby, anxiously waits for Eddie to arrive. As she is waiting,

Mahoney comes up to Kathy and strikes up a conversation. Mahoney's dialog goes about as smooth as 40-grit sandpaper on silk. Mahoney, who finally gets up the nerve to ask Kathy out on a date, asks, "do you want to go and get some pizza with me after track practice today?" Kathy declines, telling Mahoney, "you shouldn't be eating pizza when you're in training!" Kathy then sees Eddie walk into the school building. She abruptly ends her conversation with Mahoney, telling him, "I'm sorry. I got to go." Mahoney, a bit puzzled by Kathy abruptly ending their conversation, watches as she runs across the lobby.

Kathy runs up to Eddie. She takes him by the arm, and locks elbows with him. As they walk through the lobby, Kathy tells Eddie, "good morning! I've missed you!" Kathy's warm good morning leaves absolutely no doubt as to her intentions. Kathy walks Eddie to class as Mahoney tries to pull the dagger out of his chest. Walking Eddie down the hall, Kathy does so in a way that is noticed by all. When they arrive at Eddie's classroom, Kathy walks in with him in a way that advertises to everyone that Eddie is now with her. Kathy tells Eddie, "see you after school." Eddie replies, "yeah! Definitely."

Walking over to the window, Eddie takes his seat near Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. Mark asks Eddie, "so, what's up with Kathy?" Not wanting to become the center of attention, Eddie simply replies, "I think she likes me." Braden says, "yeah, bro. Tell us something we don't know." Wendy brilliantly stays out of the conversation, seeing it as "guy talk". Mark comments, "yeah, she likes you all right. Everyone can see that. It's been obvious since the first time she met you."

Braden, who is very observant, tells Mark, "yeah. And, I've noticed that Paula has been looking at you a lot more recently." Mark asks, "really? She has?" This is good news to Mark, who has had his eyes on Paula for a while. Braden tells Mark, "yeah. She's got her hands all over your ass when she's helping you with the blocks. Don't tell me you don't see it." Miss Starr walks into the classroom, sparing Eddie from the game of twenty questions with his friends. Mark, however, wanted the conversation to continue, as he wanted to hear more. If he is lucky, Mark might hear more from his buddies during the next class.

The next class is science class, specifically Earth Science. The group walks into class, and takes their usual seat near the window. Somehow, for Eddie, just staring out at an open field is sometimes more interesting than listening to some of the crap they teach in school. Mr. Lambert, the teacher, tells everyone to have a seat so he can begin. Today's discussion is about the weather, specifically lightning.

During the lecture, Mark whispers to Eddie, "so, honestly, do you think Paula likes me?" Eddie asks Mark, "honestly?" Mark replies, "yeah." Eddie

drops the bombshell, telling Mark, “bro! It’s obvious to everyone but you. She does, no doubt.” Mark replies, asking, “you ain’t shittin’ me, are you?” Eddie replies, “no, bro. She’s looking at you all the time, and she has her hands all over you every chance she gets.”

Mr. Lambert hears Eddie talking to Mark during class. With all of his craftiness, Mr. Lambert asks Eddie, “Eddie, I presume you are discussing my lecture with Mark. Did you have a question, or can I clear something up for you?” Eddie replies, “yes.” Mr. Lambert replies, “okay, Eddie, what is it?” Clearing up any doubt that he was listening to Mr. Lambert, Eddie replies to him, “you said lightning strikes the highest thing in the area, right?” Mr. Lambert confirms, “yes, that is correct. Is there a question?” Eddie then asks his question, “so, if lightning strikes the highest thing in the area, that means you should not smoke pot during a thunderstorm, right?”

The whole class bursts out in laughter, including Mr. Lambert, who desperately tries to hide his own amusement. Mark, with an inside joke, adds, “or take some of that psycho Chubin.” Eddie, Braden, Bobby B., and anyone else who remembers that incident from health class last year, begins to crack up even more. Mr. Lambert, realizing the best thing to do is just let the laughter run its course, has a problem containing his own laughter. After five minutes or so, the class is finally back to order, and Mr. Lambert continues his lecture. One thing was learned today. You can’t outsmart Eddie on the track or in the classroom.

At the end of the day, it’s back to track practice for the team. Practice is uneventful, other than Mahoney giving Eddie the occasional evil eye. Eddie has no knowledge of what transpired between Mahoney and Kathy before he got to school this morning. During practice, Mahoney asks Ambrosini, “how much did Eddie bench in gym class that day?” Ambrosini, who cannot remember, replies, “something like 250 pounds. The rumor is that he can do a lot more.” Mahoney tells Ambrosini, “those four guys are animals.” Mahoney was asking because he is attempting to compare Eddie’s strength with his own. Mahoney quickly realizes he comes up short in that category too.

At the end of today’s practice session, Kathy asks Eddie, “do you want to go get pizza after practice today?” Eddie replies, “sure! Let me just call my mom and tell her not to wait for me for dinner.” Kathy, happy as she can be, says, “okay then! It’s a date!” Kathy and Eddie’s conversation, of course, is overheard by Mahoney, who is now pulling the second dagger out of his chest today. Mahoney, who tries to forget about it, keeps thinking about Kathy’s earlier comment, “you shouldn’t be eating pizza when you’re in training.”

Eddie and Kathy walk to the pizzeria, which is only a minor detour from their walk home. The team members in the front of the school see Eddie and Kathy as they walk away, holding hands. Since it is cold out, they are walking close together. No one really thinks too much about Kathy and Eddie walking together, except for Mahoney, who is red with envy.

Kathy and Eddie talk about track on the way to dinner. Eddie asks Kathy, “so, how did you learn all about setting the blocks?” Kathy tells him, “oh. That’s an easy one. My dad is an Exercise Science professor over at the University, which means he’s basically a glorified gym teacher. My dad, Mr. Frazier, and Mr. Zunde are friends.”

Kathy again tells Eddie, “I’m still amazed how fast you are. Not only you, but your friends.” Eddie says, “oh, you mean the tribe.” Kathy, in wonderment, asks, “the tribe?” Eddie responds, “yeah. Me, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B.” Eddie explains, “Anthony Ambrosini said to me in gym class one day during a football game, ‘what kind of tribe are you running?’ Since then, we’ve been known as ‘the tribe.’” Kathy tells Eddie, “I like that, ‘the tribe.’” In an afterthought, Eddie adds, “oh, yeah. Johnson and Mitchell are also in the tribe.” Once they get to the pizzeria, shop talk is over, and the conversation shifts more toward other topics.

Following a two-hour dinner at the pizzeria, Kathy and Eddie begin to walk home. The sun set a while ago, so the temperature is quickly dropping. After walking down the main road, they turn right onto a dark road leading toward Kathy’s house. Being cold and dark outside, the road is mostly deserted, with an occasional car driving by. As they get within view of Kathy’s house, Kathy tells Eddie, “I really liked our day.” Eddie replies, “yeah, me too.” Kathy stops, turns toward Eddie, and asks, “what are we doing tomorrow?”

Before Eddie can even answer the question, Kathy puts her arms around his neck, and tells him, “I don’t want to go. Make the night last longer!” Kathy touches her lips to Eddie, surprising him with a little more than a goodnight kiss. Eddie and Kathy embrace each other again, this time longer, as they hug each other tightly. As they finish their walk home, both know something changed just then.

When they get to Kathy’s house, Kathy sighs and says, “well, here’s my stop again. We should have taken the long way home.” Eddie tells Kathy, “this has been my favorite day ever.” Kathy and Eddie walk up to the door, and say good night to each other. As Kathy goes inside, Eddie walks to the sidewalk and makes his way home.

The next day at school, Kathy is sitting on the bench in the school lobby again waiting for Eddie to arrive. When Eddie walks in, Kathy runs

up to meet him. Kathy takes Eddie's arm and walks him to class, getting there a little early this time. They talk in the hallway for a while. But, as the halls empty out, Kathy has to get to class or she'll be late. In front of the open classroom door, Kathy gives Eddie a quick kiss before she heads down the hall. Kathy, in essence, made it a point to let everyone around know that Eddie is now unavailable.

Eddie walks into the classroom, and takes his usual seat. Braden, the only one to make a comment, says to Eddie, "that looks like a little more than just liking you." Eddie, who has his mind elsewhere, just replies, "I guess so." Meanwhile, Mark is busy copying an assignment he failed to complete for the next class. Mark is hoping for the conversation to come back to Paula, but there is no such luck today. Bobby B., just staring out the window, is not even fully awake yet. Eddie, the only energetic one in the group, cannot wait until school is over so he can see Kathy again.

For the next few weeks, the team practices several times a week. The track meets, which are primarily held on the weekends, all go well. Eddie and his tribe gain a lot of confidence over the season, especially in the 4 by 440 relay. With the State invitational meet in the near future, Mr. Frazier and his team assistants give some additional attention to the athletes who have been invited to the event. Eddie still does some extra training at home, and is taking the vitamins and amino acids that were recommended by the doctor.

Kathy has also been spending a lot of time with Eddie, but not just in the capacity of helping out with the team. One afternoon after school, Eddie invites Kathy over to see his workout area. Kathy has been wanting to see it, and today is her chance. It's not so much that she wants to see the workout area, but that she wants to be with Eddie. Eddie and Kathy walk home from school, and stop by Kathy's house. They walk inside, and she drops her stuff off. Kathy tells Eddie, "I'll be right back," as she runs upstairs for a few minutes.

As Kathy comes downstairs, Eddie looks and sees that she changed into workout clothes. Eddie, stating the obvious, says to Kathy, "you changed." Kathy replies, "yeah! You didn't think I was just going to look at your equipment! We're using it!" Eddie, surprised that Kathy wanted to work out, is definitely excited. Kathy gets her jacket, and they head out the door.

When they get to Eddie's house, Eddie introduces Kathy to his mother. After a short conversation, Eddie's mom asks Kathy, "would you like to stay for dinner?" Without any hesitation, Kathy replies, "oh, I'd love to! Let me just call my mom and make sure it's okay." As Kathy is calling her mom, Eddie is thinking that he'll have more time to be with Kathy if she can stay. After Kathy hangs up the phone, she says to Eddie and his

mom, “well, the answer is,” and after a long pause she says, with excitement, “I can stay!” Eddie’s mom smiles and says, “okay. I’ll set another plate.”

Eddie and Kathy head downstairs to work out. Kathy, looking at Eddie’s bench and squat rack, says, “wow! Nice setup!” Eddie asks, “what do you want to work on first?” Kathy replies, “we’re doing bench first. Do you think you can keep up with me?” Eddie smiles, and replies, “probably not. But I’ll give it a try.” This is something Eddie really likes about Kathy. She is very assertive, and has no problem expressing herself. Eddie loads the bar with 50 pounds, and Kathy does a warm-up set. Eddie is impressed that Kathy knows exactly what to do.

Eddie continues to raise the weight for Kathy, getting up to 100 pounds. Kathy, laying on the bench, tells Eddie, “okay, spot me.” Kathy lowers the bar to her chest, and raises the bar without any help. All energetic, Kathy tells Eddie, “let’s do 120, please, please, please!” They put ten more pounds on each side, and Kathy gets back on the bench. Laying on the bench, Kathy tells Eddie, “I’ve never done 120 before.” Eddie, giving Kathy some confidence, tells her, “yeah, but you will today.” Kathy lowers the weight to her chest, and starts to raise the bar. Eddie tells her, “come on, you can do it. You can do it!” As Kathy raises the bar, Eddie tells her, “push, push!” After Kathy returns the bar to the uprights all by herself, she gets off the bench. She gives Eddie a high-five as she exclaims, “new max! Awesome!”

Kathy tells Eddie, “okay, now it’s your turn!” Eddie gets on the bench and does a warm-up set. While Eddie is doing his warm-up set, Kathy takes two dumbbells and starts doing overhead dumbbell presses. After Eddie finishes his warm-up set, he looks over at Kathy working with the dumbbells. Teasing Eddie, Kathy says, “you didn’t think I was going to just sit around and watch, did you?” Eddie replies, “it almost looks like you’ve done this before.” Kathy humorously replies, “yeah. Maybe once or twice.” It is clear to Eddie that Kathy is no novice at working out. Kathy and Eddie have more fun working out together than they could have imagined. After working out for about an hour, Kathy and Eddie head upstairs for dinner.

After dinner, it comes time for Eddie to walk Kathy home. Kathy tells Eddie’s mom and dad, “thank you so much for having me over for dinner. It was really good!” Eddie’s mom tells Kathy, “we’ve enjoyed having you. Come over anytime.” Eddie is certainly glad to hear that. Eddie’s mom says to Kathy, “it’s cold out. Would you like me to drive you home?” Kathy replies, “no, thank you. It’s only a half mile, and we like to walk.” As they walk out the door, Eddie tells his mom, “I’ll be back later.”

On the way, Kathy tells Eddie, “we’re taking the long way home today.” Eddie replies, “which way is that?” Kathy tells Eddie, “when we get there, I’ll show you.” As they approach the elementary school, Kathy takes a detour into the schoolyard. There is another smaller entrance for kids who walk to school on the other side of the field, which is actually a shortcut to Kathy’s house. Eddie tells Kathy, “this looks like it’s a short cut.” Kathy, leaving Eddie wondering, tells Eddie, “no, it’s the long way. You’ll see.”

Walking through the field, Eddie tells Kathy, “I really had a great time today.” Kathy replies, “me too. We’ll have to work out together more often.” As they are walking, they come up to a small row of bleachers next to the pee wee ball field. Kathy sits on the bleachers, and Eddie sits next to her, holding her hand. Kathy gets up and sits on Eddie’s lap. Putting her arms around Eddie, Kathy looks Eddie in the eye, telling him, “this, Eddie, is the long way home.” Kathy kisses Eddie, with an embrace so warm it could melt the light snow that is beginning to fall. Kathy and Eddie make out on the bleachers for quite a while, each wondering where the other has been their entire lives.

Eventually, they have to continue their way back to Kathy’s house. As they stand up, and walk, neither Kathy nor Eddie can walk straight. Seemingly drunk with each other’s passion, they stumble toward the school entrance on Kathy’s street. Eddie tells Kathy, “I really like taking the long way home.” Kathy passionately tells Eddie, “when I say, ‘let’s take the long way home’, well, this is the long way home.”

As they approach Kathy’s house, Kathy sighs because the evening is coming to an end. She says to Eddie, “well, here’s my stop again.” Eddie walks Kathy to the door. They kiss goodnight, and Kathy passionately whispers in his ear, “see you tomorrow.” Kathy goes inside, as Eddie walks to the sidewalk. As Eddie walks away, Kathy watches through the window, sad that Eddie has to make the half mile walk home by himself. To Eddie, who can easily run a half mile in less than two minutes and thirty seconds, the trip home seems like it takes forever without Kathy.

A few days later, Eddie’s mother, Nina, encounters Mark’s mother, Mariana, at the local farmers market. They both shop in the same markets, and see each other quite frequently. Nina tells Mariana, “Eddie’s got a girl now, so he’s not home as much. She’s good for him. They really like each other.” Mariana replies, “Mark’s got his eye on someone too. Some girl helping out with the track team.” Nina tells Mariana, “I guess they’re at that age.” Bearing some good news, Nina tells Mariana, “Eddie and his girl, Katarina, go out and eat after school a lot. He’s even saving me a little on my grocery bill!” Nina and Mariana compare notes as usual about what is fresh or a good deal. They then continue shopping on their own, only to meet again on another day.

With the State invitational meet just around the corner, Eddie invites his parents, his friends, and everyone he knows. Eddie knows that, with people watching him, he will run a better race. Mark, Braden, Johnson, Mitchell, and Bobby B. also invite their parents, who were all going to show up anyway. Mitchell also invites his girlfriend, Amber Amy, who is still in middle school. Forming their own cheerleading squad, the tribe will definitely gain a slight edge over the competition. Paula and Barbara also invite their parents to the meet. Kathy, however, has a surprise for Eddie about her parents attending the meet.

The day of the State invitational meet finally arrives, and the team meets at the school. They will take the bus together to the coliseum, which is about eight miles away. Mr. Frazier is proud to have a good number of competitors going to the meet this year. Most schools are lucky to have one or two runners who qualify for the State invitational meet.

Eddie will be running the 40-yard dash and the 4 by 440 relay today. Mark and Braden will be running the 440-yard dash, and will be later joining Eddie and Johnson in the 4 by 440 relay. Johnson, taking first place in a 220-yard dash during a 4-way meet late in the season, qualified for that event. Darryl Bell, who also qualified in the 220-yard dash, will be joining Johnson in that event. Mitchell, who qualified in the mile, will also be competing today. A handful of other runners, who are mostly juniors and seniors, fill the rest of the bus. Conspicuously missing from the bus today is Paul Mahoney, who's best performance this season was third place in the 880-yard run.

Sitting on the bus next to Eddie, not surprisingly, is Kathy. Kathy, who was present at the State invitational meet last year, knows how tough the competition can be. Kathy tells Eddie, "this is going to be the hardest meet of the year. Mr. Frazier was so happy last year when the team took home one medal." Eddie optimistically replies, "hopefully, we can do better than that this year." Kathy, holding Eddie's hand during the entire trip, knows this will be a really hard meet for Eddie. Eddie has placed first in every event he ran this year, so she is hoping he doesn't get too upset if he doesn't take home a medal today. Eddie tells Kathy, "I invited my whole family. Maybe I'll run faster." Kathy tells Eddie, "my mom is going to be watching too." Eddie asks, "how about your dad?" Kathy smiles, and tells Eddie, "oh, that's a surprise! You'll see."

After a short trip, the bus arrives and the team disembarks. Mr. Frazier instructs the team, "okay, everyone, follow me. And, don't get lost." Mr. Frazier has been to the coliseum many times before, and knows his way around well. After Mr. Frazier checks in with the security guard, the team enters through a gate which leads to a long tunnel. At the end of the tunnel are the entrances to the locker rooms. The team gets

settled in their assigned locker area. Once everyone is ready, the team heads out another tunnel to the arena. When Mark sees the track, he exclaims, “okay, now this is really the big time!” The team meets up with Kathy, Barbara, and Paula, who entered the arena through the women’s locker room.

The first event up is the 40-yard dash. Mr. Frazier tells Eddie that his best time this year is in the top four of the field of 28 runners. This is encouraging, since no one really wants to come in last place. Coming in last place will make the event feel like a wasted effort. Once the 40-yard dash gets underway, the meet will move along quickly. Until then, most of the runners sit around nervously waiting for something to happen.

The announcement finally comes signifying the start of the meet. The Meet Announcer introduces the meet officials, including the Meet Director, whose name is Dr. Alexander Karakova. Kathy whispers to Eddie, “I told you I had a surprise for you.” Eddie whispers back, “wow! I’ll be running right in front of you and your dad.” The Meet Announcer then introduces the teams that are present, and opens the meet with a prayer. After the announcements, the Meet Announcer tells the contestants in the 40-yard dash to meet at the starting position in ten minutes. Nearby is a bulletin board that has the heat and lane assignments for each runner, which each runner checks before the race.

Eddie, in the second heat, feels like he is under enormous pressure. Kathy tells Eddie, “remember your block settings. Good luck, sweetie. I’ll see you at the finish.” Kathy jogs over to the finish line so that she can be there when Eddie finishes. As the first heat gets ready to run, Eddie, and the rest of the second heat, lines up a few yards behind them.

Once the runners appear to be ready, the Starter tells the runners, “on your marks.” Eddie watches carefully to observe the procedure. The Starter then announces, “set.” Looking around, Eddie sees nothing unusual, other than there are many more officials than usual. The buzzer sounds, and the runners are out of the blocks. In five seconds, the race, which Eddie paid little attention to, is over. As the second heat gets ready, Eddie notices another race, the mile, has already started.

The Meet Announcer tells the second heat to get ready to run. Eddie, assigned to lane four, adjusts the blocks with the settings given to him by Kathy. Eddie also notices that, even though this is a State invitational meet, some runners do not pay attention to the block settings.

The Starter tells the runners, “on your marks.” In a few seconds, the Starter announces, “set.” Eddie is set, and is ready as ever for the buzzer to sound. The buzzer sounds, and Eddie is out of the blocks like a madman on a mission. At ten yards, Eddie is in the lead, and presumably

at his top speed. He hears the runner to his right gaining on him. He knows the sound of a runner right behind him very well. Eddie, somehow, is able to move his legs even faster. With ten yards to go, Eddie adds to his lead. In another second, Eddie crosses the finish line first, winning his heat.

The runner in lane five, who was gaining on Eddie, came in second place. Third through fifth place, however, is up for discussion. While the officials must determine the third, fourth, and fifth place runners and their times, technically it does not matter. In this particular heat, anyone finishing after second place will not be in the final. Their times were simply not good enough. As the officials examine the photographs, Eddie walks over to Kathy and Mr. Frazier, standing in the coaches area.

Mr. Frazier congratulates Eddie, giving him a high-five. Eddie asks Mr. Frazier, "what was my time?" Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, "we both clocked you at 4.5! But, they won't publish the official times until all of the heats are over." Eddie asks, "why not?" Mr. Frazier explains, "in the preliminaries, to be fair, if you knew the time to beat, you'd have an advantage." Eddie understands, but is nevertheless ecstatic with his unofficial time. Mr. Frazier tells Kathy and Eddie, "I'm going over to Mitchell. He's running the mile."

Kathy, who has to act more reserved around Mr. Frazier, lets out her excitement, as Mr. Frazier jogs away. With Mr. Frazier now gone, Kathy gives Eddie a high-five and exclaims, "you ran really, really good!" Eddie asks, "do you think it's good enough for the final?" Kathy whispers to Eddie, "so far, it is." Just then, the Starter announces, "on your marks." Kathy tells Eddie, "okay, I got to get back to work." Kathy, clipboard in hand, is ready to time the next heat and record any times she can. Eddie goes back to the team bench area, waiting for his next event, which will hopefully be the 40-yard dash final.

When the preliminary 40-yard dash heats are completed, Kathy walks over to the team bench. She whispers in Eddie's ear, "you made the final. You're the number three seed." Kathy then walks over to Mr. Frazier, who is talking with Johnson. Johnson, who is about to run in the 220-yard dash, will have a tough race. Kathy lets Mr. Frazier know what she found out, telling him, "Eddie's in. He's the number three seed." Mr. Frazier grins ear to ear, seen by Eddie all the way over at the team bench. Kathy goes over to the bulletin board, and writes down the runner's names and lane assignments in Johnson's heat. Getting her stopwatches ready, Kathy goes to work with Paula, recording as many of the runner's times as they can. This information will prove valuable to Mr. Frazier and the team in future meets.

Meanwhile, Barbara notices the times were posted for the 40-yard dash. She writes them down on her clipboard, and delivers them to Mr. Frazier. Mr. Frazier looks over the list, and tells her to show the list to Eddie. Barbara walks over to the team bench, and hands Eddie the list. Eddie looks over his competition, and notices his time was a 4.6, not a 4.5. Two other runners were clocked at 4.5. The other runners were all in the upper 4-second range.

Eddie wonders why his times were slower than in the other meet. He mentions to Louis Zaino, a junior who is looking over the list with him, "I wonder why my time is not as good as the last meet. I thought I ran faster." Eddie's teammate explains to him, "it's the Timekeepers. As long as the same Timekeepers are working the clocks, everything's consistent." Eddie asks Zaino, "so, my best, which is a 4.4, could have been a 4.6?" Zaino replies, "exactly. But, winning is the only thing that counts." Explaining further, Zaino tells Eddie, "you're at this meet because you won a lot of races, not only because of what your times were." Zaino has a point. Eddie decided he would be more focused on winning than on his times for today.

The call for the 40-yard dash final is made. The Meet Announcer broadcasts, "will the 40-yard dash contestants please check the roster located on the bulletin board. If you are a finalist, please be at the starting location for that event in five minutes." None of the runners have to look at the roster. They've all already looked at it immediately after it was posted a while ago. The finalists know who they are, and what lane they are in. But, nevertheless, the official announcement has to be made.

Eddie walks over to the starting area, and Kathy joins him on the way. Mr. Frazier is already positioned near the finish line, and is wise enough to let Kathy escort Eddie to the starting area. Mr. Frazier is no idiot. He sees what is going on between Eddie and Kathy. If her presence can make Eddie run any faster, Mr. Frazier will stay out of the way.

Kathy tells Eddie, "remember your block settings." Eddie tells her, "don't worry about that. I got those down now." Kathy informs Eddie, "I have to go over to the finish line. I'm still working." Before she leaves, Kathy whispers in Eddie's ear, "run this one for me." Kathy then walks to the finish line to join Mr. Frazier.

The Starter tells the runners, "this is the final for the 40-yard dash. Congratulations for making it this far! Please take your lanes." The runners set their blocks, and stand behind them when they are ready. Eddie, the third seed, is in lane five. In lane four is none other than John Brady, the top seed, who Eddie beat in a 4-way meet earlier this year. Brady is the guy Mark threw off base during that meet just before the

buzzer sounded, causing Brady to lose the race. Eddie, learning from Mark, thinks of a plan to distract Brady again.

The Starter announces, “on your marks.” This is it, the final. In a few seconds, there will be a winner. The runners get themselves positioned in the blocks. The Starter then announces, “set.” As everyone moves into the “set” position, Eddie whispers to Brady, “you again?” With everyone ready to go, Brady briefly turns his head, looking at Eddie.

The buzzer sounds, and Eddie is out of the blocks as fast as he has ever been. Brady, being distracted, is out of the blocks last. Sharing the lead at ten yards, Eddie is head to head with the runner in lane three. At the midway point, the runner in lane three is leading the race. Eddie is trying his best to catch him. With 10 yards remaining, Eddie finds himself a few feet behind the leader, with not enough distance left in the race to catch him. The runner in lane three crosses the finish line first, with Eddie a split second behind. Eddie takes second place, being edged out by a senior who already has a scholarship in track. Brady, distracted again, did not medal in the race.

Mr. Frazier congratulates Eddie on a fine run, giving him two high-fives and a fist bump. Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, “that’s second place in the State meet! And you’re a freshman!” Eddie is jubilant that he got second place. Learning from Zaino, Eddie is not concerned with his time. This time, his time didn’t matter. What did matter is that he earned a medal for second place. Mr. Frazier congratulates Eddie again, and then has to go to monitor the mile medley relay, which is up next.

After Mr. Frazier walks away, Kathy, all excited, runs up to Eddie. Kathy gives Eddie a high-five and a hug, telling him, “second place! Awesome!” Eddie looks at Kathy, remembering that she said to him, “run this one for me.” A tear comes from Eddie’s eye, and Kathy immediately asks, “what’s wrong, sweetie?” Eddie tells her, “I lost.” Kathy tells Eddie, “no, no. You won! Trust me. You really won! You’re a freshman. Most of these guys are seniors.” Eddie, all emotional, confesses, “when you said, ‘run this one for me,’ I wanted to give you better than second place.” Kathy gives Eddie a big hug, telling him, “you’re first place in my book.” Kathy tells Eddie, “you’ve given me more than I ever wanted, and it’s found right here,” placing her open hand over Eddie’s heart. Eddie gives Kathy a big hug, and they start walking back to the bench.

After many events, the end of the meet approaches, and so does the final event of the afternoon, the 4 by 440 relay. The Meet Announcer makes the final announcement for the event, and instructs the runners to get ready. There will be eighteen teams competing in this event, which will require three heats. There is no runoff, so the best time will take first place. Eddie, and his relay team, will be in heat two. The first heat gets

ready, but Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden pay no attention. They are too focused on their own upcoming performance, not on someone else's race.

After the first heat is over, the Meet Announcer tells the second heat to get on the track. The team will run in their new order, which was instituted after the first 4-way meet of the season. Mark will be leading off, followed by Johnson, then Eddie, and finally the anchorman, Braden. Braden, who likes to "kick ass", makes a good anchorman. Braden was shifted to the anchorman position because his body is good at delivering what his mind conceives. Braden, however, is unusually quiet today. This is the State invitational meet. If Braden is caught bragging and cannot deliver, he will look a bit too much like Mahoney.

Mark, the lead man, walks up to the starting position with the team. Mr. Frazier, Kathy, and Paula are with the relay team as they prepare to run. Kathy tells Eddie, "just run your best. That's really all that you can do." Paula, who has the baton, hands it to Mark. Paula tells Mark, "you are one of the fastest in your leg, but Johnson's going to be up against trouble in his leg." Putting her arm around Mark's shoulder, Paula tells him, "you really have to run your best today." As Paula walks back to where Mr. Frazier is standing, Eddie winks at Mark, and says, "see?" Mark now understands that Paula might just like him after all. It certainly took Mark long enough to figure it out.

The long awaited announcement comes from the Starter to get ready for the second heat. Once the runners are all on the track, Kathy, who is very familiar with the rules, points out to Mr. Frazier that the runner in lane four is wearing a wristwatch. Wearing a watch during a race is grounds for immediate disqualification. This is part of Kathy's job, to do anything to give the team an edge. Mr. Frazier takes note, and confides with Kathy, "thank you. If the officials don't catch it, I'll point it out to them after the race starts." Mr. Frazier, reconsidering, tells Kathy, "on second thought, I'll let you point it out to the Lane Judge. Just wait until I tell you. But, don't tell anyone on the team yet." Wisely, Mr. Frazier does not want to bring the infraction to the attention of the officials until the race starts. This is a quick and easy way to eliminate one team from the competition.

The Starter announces, "on your marks." The runners position themselves in the blocks, including the runner in lane four wearing the wristwatch. The Starter tells the runners, "get set." Four seconds later, which is longer than usual, the buzzer sounds, and the runners are off. Mr. Frazier, pointing to an official, tells Kathy, "okay, point the infraction out to that Lane Judge. But, remember, don't tell anyone on the team yet." Kathy jogs over to the Lane Judge and says to him, "Mr. Frazier, our coach, wanted to let you know that the guy in lane four is wearing a

watch.” The Lane Judge tells Kathy, “uh oh. That’s not good. I’ll take a look when he comes around the curve.” As the runners come around the curve, it looks like Mark is having an awesome run. The Lane Judge says to Kathy, “there it is. I see it. Thanks.” The Lane Judge walks over and mentions it to the Timekeeper assigned to that lane, just so there is more than one official who sees the infraction.

When Kathy returns to the relay team and Mr. Frazier, Eddie asks, “what’s up?” Kathy tells him, “Mr. Frazier wanted me to tell him something.” Eddie, who is up next, didn’t think much of Kathy’s response. As they watch the handoff from Mark to Johnson, Eddie tells Kathy, “it looks like I’m up next.” Kathy gives Eddie a hug, as they both get back to work. Eddie looks over the field, and sees that Johnson is in second place, although the race is very close. As Johnson, on his first lap passes by Eddie, Eddie waits a bit, and then enters the transition zone to receive the baton.

As Johnson completes his final lap, he enters the transition zone, and Eddie takes the baton from him as fast as he can. Somewhat observant, Eddie recognizes that he is in second place after receiving the baton, but could not see which team is ahead. Since this is a relay race, no one wants to disappoint the other team members, so they go all out. Eddie sprints the first 110 yards to gain some ground. Realizing he hadn’t gained much ground, he must also sprint the second 110 yards as well. After the first lap, Eddie says to himself, “what the hell. I’ll just sprint for the whole race.” Eddie, still in second place, is giving it all he has, and then some. It is better to go all out than to find out later that, with a little more effort, the race could have been won. For Eddie, the good news ahead is that Braden, the chief ass kicker, is in the transition zone. After handing off to Braden, Eddie walks off his 440-yard sprint, watching Braden as he runs his leg.

Braden, back to his hyper excitable self, is running to win. The expression on his face as he is running says victory. As Braden enters his second lap, Kathy tells Eddie, who is still recovering, “you ran better than 54 seconds on your leg. I just wanted to tell you the good news.” Eddie tells Kathy, “I feel like I just ran a 44.” Kathy and Eddie watch Braden, as he is finishing the last lap. The 54-second time, which is approximate, has not yet sunk into Eddie’s mind. Fixed on the finish line, Eddie, Kathy, and the rest of the team watch as Braden gives it his best. At the finish line, Braden crosses second, with the runner whose team was assigned to lane four crossing the finish line first.

Mr. Frazier and Kathy are exuberant that the team did so well. Mr. Frazier tells the team, “congratulations. You guys are awesome. You won your heat!” The relay team, however, is perplexed. They saw Braden take second place. Mark asks, “what are you talking about? I thought we got

second.” Mr. Frazier informs Mark and the team, “the lead off man in lane four was wearing a wristwatch, so they’re disqualified.”

Brady’s school, Riverdale, is still unaware they’ve been disqualified. They will find out later but, as of now, they think they are in the lead. Kathy tells Eddie, “Mr. Frazier said not to tell anyone until the race was over.” Mr. Frazier, overhearing Kathy, says to everyone, “I said that because, if you guys knew they were disqualified, you may not have run as fast!” Mr. Frazier then exclaims, “oh! And, by the way, that was your best time of the year!” Since their event is over, the team heads to the bench, to sit and rest.

With heat three underway, Mr. Frazier tells the team some good news. Mr. Frazier whispers to the team, “don’t get too excited but, according to my stopwatch, you guys are unofficially in first place.” Mr. Frazier has his stopwatch timing the current heat, as Kathy, Barbara, and Paula record the 440-yard split times of the current runners. The winner of the event, however, will not be known until the last heat is over. This is because, in the relay race, the best time wins. There is no runoff or final, so everyone must run their best during their heat.

With the last race over, and the meet over, the entire team finally relaxes together on the bench. The work is all done. The team is anxiously waiting to hear who won the 4 by 440 relay. Afterwards will be the awards ceremony. As the last heat is over, Kathy, Barbara, and Paula return to the bench. The three girls share with Mr. Frazier their final statistics but, right now, Mr. Frazier is only interested in one statistic, which is who won the 4 by 440 relay.

After considerable time, the Meet Announcer comes to the microphone to deliver the results of the 4 by 440 relay. The delay in the announcement is due to the disqualification, which had to be brought to the attention of the Meet Clerk. The Meet Announcer finally announces, “in the 4 by 440 relay event, in first place, Northside High.” The Meet Announcer continues to announce the results, but Eddie and the rest of the relay team are cheering so loud they miss hearing which teams got second and third place.

Jumping up and down and celebrating, the 4 by 440 relay team is exchanging high-fives with the rest of the team. Kathy and Eddie give each other a big hug. Kathy yells out to Eddie and everyone else on the relay team, “you guys won State! You guys did it!” Braden, back to his usual hyperenergetic self, is running around ranting, “we did it! We kicked ass! And, there’s gonna be a lot more ass kicking coming down in the Spring!” Even Johnson, who is a little on the reserved side, is giving a high-five to everyone he can find. Mark, however, is no longer cheering along with the team. Mark has moved a little farther away from the main

festivities, and having his own celebration. Paula is giving Mark a hug, a hug that lasts a little bit longer than a victory hug.

The Meet Announcer tells the crowd, “the awards ceremony will begin in fifteen minutes.” The Meet Announcer instructs the teams, “coaches, please have your teams return to your benches.” Mr. Frazier is totally ecstatic at the team’s performance today. Mr. Frazier has not delivered this well of a performance at the State invitational meet during his entire career. It is quite rare for any coach to have one student go to the State invitational meet. This year, Mr. Frazier had quite a few.

Meanwhile, still discussing the outcome of the 4 by 440 relay with Alexander Karakova, the Meet Director, is Riverdale’s coach, Mr. Lyons. Mr. Lyons tells the Meet Director, “wearing a watch shouldn’t disqualify my team. It was completely unintentional.” Dr. Karakova simply asks the coach, “then, you want me to take the rule book, tear out a page, and throw it away?” Mr. Lyons replies, “that’s not what I’m asking!” Dr. Karakova rebuts, “then, what are you asking? The rules explicitly state that a runner may not wear a watch while he or she is running. To overlook the infraction is to disregard the rules.” The coach continues to argue, stating, “but, it was a 440! It’s not like he was timing himself!” Dr. Karakova finally explains to the coach in no uncertain terms, telling him, “look, this is why we have Lane Judges. They caught it, and I have absolutely no grounds to overturn their decision.” The Riverdale coach walks away, severely disappointed. The relay team that was disqualified will be even more disappointed once they hear the news.

Beginning the awards ceremony, the Meet Announcer addresses the crowd, “this has been a most excellent competition. We have had quite a few close races this year. The talent present here in the arena is among the best we have ever seen. Every single one of our athletes has given it their best this year.” After a few more announcements, the Meet Announcer then moves on to the core of the ceremony. The Meet Announcer tells the runners, “when you hear your name, please come up to the stage and stand on the appropriate tier for your place in your event.” He continues giving instruction, identifying where the runners in first, second, and third place should stand. This is not hard to figure out, but he has to make the announcement anyway. And, undoubtedly, one of the athletes will screw it up and stand on the wrong tier.

The Meet Announcer begins with the 40-yard dash. Opening the delivery of the awards, he announces, “in first place, from Henderson High, Damien Harrington.” As the first place winner approaches the stage, the Meet Announcer continues, “in second place, from Northside High, Edward Bogenskaya.” Eddie, sitting next to Kathy, stands up to go and receive his medal. Kathy stands up with Eddie, and gives him a hug in front of everyone in the arena, telling him, “I’m so proud of you! You

did so good!" Kathy sits on the bench, as Eddie walks up to the stage, not paying attention to who took third place.

Standing on the second place tier, Eddie waits to receive his medal. The officials drape the medals around the three winners' necks as the crowd applauds. Cheers can be heard from the benches of the winning teams. Eddie is actually able to hear Kathy cheering from the stage where he is standing. Kathy sincerely wishes she could drape the medal around Eddie's neck, but is very happy just seeing him on the winner's stage. The medalists return to their benches, and the Meet Announcer then moves on to the winners of the next event.

When Eddie returns to the bench, Mr. Frazier stops him and takes a look at the medal. Mr. Frazier congratulates Eddie once again, telling him how proud he is of Eddie and the rest of the team. When Eddie takes his seat, he lets Kathy hold his medal. Kathy has never held a State invitational meet medal before.

The mile medley team placed third in their event. Last year, Mahoney and Bell won third place in this event. The other two runners in that race were seniors, and have since graduated. This year, the medalists are Darryl Bell, Louis Zaino, Mark, and Mitchell. Mark occasionally runs this event when assigned to do so. It just so happened that, earlier this year, when Mark substituted for Ambrosini, and Mitchell substituted for Mahoney, the relay team took first place and ran a qualifying time. Unfortunate for Mahoney, he has not beat Mitchell all year in an 880-yard run, either in the 880-yard event itself or in an 880-yard relay leg. The best Mahoney could hope for is to hear about the race during school on Monday. Consisting of two juniors and two freshman, the mile medley relay team will be back next year.

The ceremony moves along quickly, with the medals being distributed in the same order in which the events were run. The Meet Announcer gets to the final event. He announces, "in the final event of the day, the 4 by 440 relay, first place goes to Northside High. Running for Northside High in the 4 by 440 relay, are Axel Braden, Eric Johnson, Edward Bogenskaya, and Mark Svoboda." He instructs the winners, "please come up to the stage." Eddie and the group stand on the first place tier, and await the second and third place winners to come up. Mr. Frazier, back at the team bench, cannot contain his excitement, primarily because his first place relay team consists of all freshmen. Mr. Frazier will have this group for another three years. Kathy and Paula, sitting on the bench together, have tears of happiness rolling down their cheeks.

Once all the teams are on their tier, the officials award the final awards of the meet. The officials drape the medals around the winners' necks. Eddie, and the rest of the team, experience one of the highest

points of their life. Winning is what they all have worked for by training for years. First place is the result of lifting weights and working out day after day. Standing on the stage is the result of running down the paved path along the parkway in the heat, cold, and rain. A gold medal is the result of bicycling and swimming to work out, not just for fun. Today is payday for the work of the last several years. The winners receive their medals, and the crowd claps and cheers. Everyone joins in to celebrate their victory.

The 4 by 440 relay event winners return to their teams, and the celebration continues. Mr. Frazier congratulates the relay team, giving each member a high-five, handshake, and fist bump. Eddie, now with two medals draped around his neck, removes the first place medal he won in the relay event and drapes it around Kathy's neck. Eddie tells Kathy, "this one's for you." Kathy, at a loss for words, does the only thing she can, which is give Eddie a hug and a kiss.

Eddie did not like coming in second place in the 100-yard dash. Keeping the second place medal for himself, it will serve as a constant reminder to work harder and train more. He gave his first place medal to Kathy, who put her heart and soul into helping the team train. Eddie now clearly understands Mr. Frazier's point of second place being the first loser. Eddie has vowed never to stand on the second place tier again.

With the ceremony over, the parents and spectators are now able to mingle with the teams. Some of the parents come down from the stands to meet with their sons. Eddie's parents find Eddie, and meet his coach, Mr. Frazier, for the first time. Kathy's father, Alexander, the Meet Director, comes over and talks with Kathy. Alexander then takes the opportunity to talk with Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, and Eddie's parents. Some of the other parents, who finally get to meet each other, join in on the conversation. Sure enough, Nina and Mariana are talking with each other, proud of Eddie's and Mark's accomplishments.

While the adults are having adult conversation, Eddie and Kathy mingle with the tribe, celebrating their win. The team members all seem to agree that Eddie's medal in the 4 by 440 relay looks much better on Kathy than it would on Eddie. The team also deeply expresses to Kathy, Barbara, and Paula how much they appreciate them working with the team this year. Kathy, who is just as happy as the 4 by 440 relay team, can see how the decorated athletes are so appreciative and nice to her. This year, Eddie and his friends have made Kathy and the other girls feel like they are part of the team, not just the team assistants.

The team heads to the locker room and back to the bus. Mark's parents offer to drive him home, but he declines. Mark tells them he wants to take the bus with the rest of the team, which is understandable

after their big victory. Eddie also takes the bus with Kathy, just so they can be together. Today, on the bus ride home, something is a little different. Paula is sitting next to Mark, leaving a little less doubt as to their interest in each other.

When the bus arrives back at the school, Mr. Frazier again congratulates the team. Mr. Frazier also tells the medalists, "if you've medaled in the State meet, you have a place on the outdoor track team. But, you'll need to come to tryouts anyway. I hope to see every one of you at tryouts in a week." This is the end of the indoor track season for this year, and it couldn't have ended any better. The Spring season, right around the corner, is sure to put forth a very competitive team.

Before everyone goes home, Mr. Frazier asks the medalists to come inside so that he can get a couple of photographs. The team enters the main gym, and sits on the bleachers for the photograph. While Mr. Frazier hunts down someone to take the photograph, Paula takes it upon herself to pose the medalists for the picture. Paula volunteered herself for this task because she has an ulterior motive. Paula has Eddie sit on the left side, with Kathy on his lap. She has Mark sit to the right, leaving a space between them for Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde to sit. Braden and Johnson sit on the row behind them, with Barbara between them. Bell, Zaino, and Mitchell, who placed in the mile medley relay, sit on the row behind Barbara, Braden, and Johnson. Paula reminds everyone, "make sure you are wearing your medals for the photograph."

When Mr. Frazier returns with the recruited photographer, Paula tells him he is to sit next to Mr. Zunde. Paula, at the last minute before the photographs are taken, takes her seat on Mark's lap, which is quite the surprise to Mark. The photographer starts taking pictures, documenting not only who won medals this year, but also who is now with whom.

On Monday, following the weekend of the State invitational meet, word gets around school that the track team took home nine medals in three events. Winning nine medals in a State invitational meet is virtually unheard of, suggesting that perhaps something about this team is special. All of the medalists are wearing their medals during school today. Anyone walking around the halls has no doubt who the medalists are. With the team needing some well needed rest, they'll get a one week break from training. Tryouts for the Spring team begin next week, which usually brings a bigger field of students attempting to make the team.

Monday morning starts with English class, which is quite a departure from the events of the weekend. As Eddie, Braden, and Mark sit in their usual place near the window, it's back to academic reality. Miss Starr walks in, who is quite aware of the events that occurred over the weekend. She asks Eddie, Mark, and Braden to come to the front of the classroom. Braden says, under his breath, "uh oh. What did we do now?"

Braden knew that they were not being called to the front of the classroom for reasons of academic excellence. Miss Starr tells Eddie, Mark, and Braden, all wearing their medals, to stand and face the classroom.

Miss Starr, announcing to the rest of her class, informs them of the good news, "Eddie, Mark, and Axel have taken first place in the State track meet this weekend in a relay race. Eddie also won second place in the 40-yard dash. Mark also got third place in another relay race. Everyone please give them a round of applause." The class cheers, applauds, and whistles, which can be heard all the way down the hall. The three medalists return to their seats with a feeling that this week is starting off great.

By midweek, the athletes have found a special place to keep their medals at home. Eddie placed his silver medal on his dresser, where it will be a constant reminder to him to work harder. Now seeing second place as the first loser as does Mr. Frazier, second place is not acceptable to Eddie.

Kathy, however, is still wearing Eddie's gold medal around her neck that he won in the 4 by 440 relay, which is noticed by everyone in school. Mahoney is very upset and angry, to say the least, that he was not invited to the State invitational meet. For some strange reason, Mahoney thinks the medal around Kathy's neck should be his. After all, this is his senior year, and he should have been the star of the team. He is constantly reminded of his failure to qualify for the meet by the medal around Kathy's neck. Seeing Kathy wear Eddie's medal before school, in the hall during class change, and after school motivates Mahoney to train harder. The Spring track season is his last chance to prove himself, and get the scholarship that he has wanted since he's been running track.

After school, on Wednesday, Mahoney runs into Kathy in the school lobby. Mahoney, stating the obvious, tells Kathy, "so, you're still wearing Eddie's medal." Mahoney's opening line simply cannot go anywhere constructive. Kathy, as cordial as she can be, replies, "yeah. The team did really good! It was an awesome race!" Mahoney points out to Kathy, "yeah. Well, I heard somebody ratted out the first place team. Something about wearing a watch, so they got disqualified." Kathy, now between a rock and a hard place, just tells Mahoney, "I wonder who would do that." Mahoney callously answers, "some jerk, probably." Kathy replies to Mahoney, "well, Karma's a bitch." Mahoney understood Kathy's statement to involve the Karma of the person ratting out the other team. What Mahoney did not understand is that Kathy was referring to Mahoney, who just called Kathy a jerk.

Kathy sees Eddie walking down the hall to the lobby, which could not have come soon enough. She abruptly tells Mahoney, "I'm sorry. I got to go." Mahoney is again ticked off that Kathy just ran off to see Eddie.

Mahoney, still interested in going out with Kathy, has no idea of what is going on between her and Eddie. Mahoney decides to do a little investigation into Eddie, and find out more about him.

Kathy runs up to Eddie, and asks, “what are we going to do after school today?” With no track practice, and lots of free time after school, they have more time to spend with each other. Eddie replies to her, “how about we see a movie, get some pizza, and take the long way home.” Kathy replies, “that sounds great!” Kathy is all in. Eddie’s plan is perfect for the afternoon. Once tryouts begin next week, there will be less time for social activities. For today, homework and tests can wait.

Kathy and Eddie walk to Kathy’s house and drop their stuff off. On the way to the movie theater, Kathy asks Eddie, “have you figured out what you want to do when you graduate?” Eddie answers her, “I sure have. I want to be a mechanic.” Eddie is used to people being disappointed in him choosing to be a mechanic. Kathy, however, tells him, “that’s wonderful! I think you’d make an awesome mechanic!”

Eddie asks Kathy the same question, “how about you? Do you know what you want to do?” Kathy’s answer, which is a bit less surprising, is, “I want to be a gym teacher. Like what I’m doing now with the track team.” Kathy also tells Eddie, “I like gym class. I like track. That’s what I really want to do.” Eddie tells Kathy, “that’s awesome! If that’s what you really want to do, go for it!” Eddie then points out, “actually, come to think about it, you’re already doing it!” Kathy replies, “wow! Yeah, I am!”

When they get to the movie theater, they check out what is playing. Since they are not in training this week, it looks like the movie choice will be a chick flick. This week is for relaxing. They decided to save the energetic movies for before a workout or while in training. Eddie buys the tickets, and they walk in. The theater is mostly empty, so they find a good seat in the back. During the movie, Kathy lays her head on Eddie’s shoulder as they hold hands. Kathy likes romantic movies. Eddie never really paid much attention to them but, now that he’s with Kathy, he finds he actually likes them. Or, perhaps it is watching the movie with Kathy that he likes.

After the movie, they head to the pizzeria. Eddie asks Kathy, “so, what did you think of the movie?” Kathy tells him, “it was pretty good. It was a little bit of a departure from the usual script.” Eddie asks, “the usual script? What’s that?” Kathy replies, “yeah, the usual script. Boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back.” She explains to him, “that’s the usual script for romantic movies, but sometimes it’s girl gets boy, girl loses boy, girl gets boy back.” Eddie tells Kathy, “wow! You got it all down.” Kathy tells Eddie, “well, there is the other script too.” Eddie asks, “okay, which one is that?” Explaining the less popular script, Kathy tells him, “boy gets girl, they fall in love, girl dies, and boy goes on living without her.” They

both have a laugh at Kathy's understanding of chick flicks, but her assessment is not far from the truth.

Pizza time comes, and they walk into the pizzeria. Inside, Joe, the man behind the counter, greets them as they walk in. Joe yells out to them, "hey! It's Kathy and Eddie! You always look so happy together!" Working in the pizzeria for years, Joe remembers everyone from the time they were four years old and had their first slice of pizza. Joe knows everyone who frequents the shop, even Vito from down the street. Joe asks them, "what can I get for you today?" They decide to split a calzone, and get a slice of pizza each.

As they are eating, Joe yells out to Kathy and Eddie from behind the counter, "if I charged by the smile, I could retire when you guys come in!" Joe knows when the young kids are happy, and he sees it in Eddie and Kathy. Joe's comment makes everyone around them smile too. Everyone inside seems to be having a good time.

But, there is someone who just drove up looking in the window that is not. Mahoney, who was going to go into the pizzeria, is sitting outside in his car watching Kathy and Eddie through the window. As Kathy and Eddie get up to leave, Mahoney drives off. Mahoney, who is still clueless about the depth of Kathy and Eddie's relationship, still thinks he has a chance with her.

After dinner, they walk back in the direction of Kathy's house. Eddie asks Kathy, "are we taking the long way home?" Kathy immediately responds, "you betcha." They take the detour into the schoolyard, and make their way to the bleachers. Kathy sits on Eddie's lap, telling him, "this is life, sweetie." Before he can even respond to what she said, Kathy kisses Eddie, as the two seem to leave the real world, and enter their own world of passion. It seems their time alone together never comes soon enough. The time they have together is always not enough, and the time to go always comes too fast.

But, it is getting late, and tomorrow's a school day. Leaving the schoolyard, Kathy stops and turns to Eddie with a tear rolling down her cheek. With a quivering voice, she tells him, "no! I can't do this! I can't let you go right now. Please, don't go." Kathy and Eddie hug each other tightly, not knowing what more to say to each other. They hug each other and kiss for a while longer. They remind each other that they will see each other tomorrow. As they walk to Kathy's house, they keep reminding each other, "we always have tomorrow."

As they get to Kathy's house, Kathy again turns to Eddie, and holds him tightly. She whispers in his ear words from her innermost being, "I don't know if I can go inside. I can't leave your side right now. I can't do it." Tears roll down Kathy's cheeks again. Eddie tells her, "let's go sit on

the grass.” They sit on the neighbor’s lawn, and hold each other. Hyperventilating, Kathy tells Eddie, “okay, you know my secret now.” Eddie asks, “secret? What secret?” Kathy unveils to him, “yeah, well, I break down like this sometimes.” She explains to Eddie, “sometimes I get really, really emotional, maybe more than I should.” Exposing her innermost feelings, she tells Eddie, “but, this is real. I’m sorry. I just get like this.” Eddie, holding her tightly, tells her, “it’s going to be okay. I promise.” Kathy whispers to him, “sometimes when I break down, it ain’t pretty.” As Kathy begins to calm down, she whispers to Eddie, “okay, let’s try this again.” They get up and walk to the house, and on the way, Kathy calms down.

As they make it to the door, Kathy says, “okay, I can do this.” Eddie whispers to her, “when you go to sleep tonight, think of me and I’ll be there with you.” Eddie also tells Kathy, “when I go to sleep, I’ll think of you, and then we’ll still be together.” Kathy and Eddie kiss goodnight. Before Eddie turns away to go home, he whispers in Kathy’s ear one more time, “remember. Think of me.”

Eddie walks to the road, and begins the long walk home alone that he has taken many times. On the way, he thinks of Kathy, and how he treasures her in his heart. As he gets close to his house, he realizes all of his school books are still at Kathy’s house. Eddie figures out a plan. He will wake up early tomorrow, and walk to school. He’ll be waiting for Kathy in front of her house when she leaves for school the next morning.

As Eddie walks into his house, a car drives down the road. This is not just any car. This is Mahoney’s car. Mahoney, who lives clear across town, is somehow found driving by Eddie’s house very late at night. What Mahoney has been up to during the last few hours is anybody’s guess.

The next morning comes and it’s back to school again. After getting ready, Eddie walks to school today. He has to get to Kathy’s house before she leaves so that he doesn’t miss her. Eddie sits on the sidewalk in front of Kathy’s house, propped up against a street lamp post waiting for Kathy to walk out the door.

In a few minutes, Kathy walks out of her house and, seeing Eddie sitting on the sidewalk, yells out, “Eddie!” Kathy drops her school books and his, which she was carrying to school for him. They run to each other, and give each other a big hug and a good morning kiss. Eddie tells Kathy, “good morning, sweetie!” Kathy replies, “oh, yeah! That it is!” After another long good morning kiss, they walk back and pick up their books, and walk to school together.

On the way to school, Eddie expresses to Kathy, “you know, if you’re going to give me this kind of good morning, I’ll walk to school every day.” All excited, Kathy replies, “that sounds like a plan to me!” Eddie asks

Kathy, “did you think of me when you were falling asleep last night?”
Kathy replies, “oh, Eddie! I did, and I had the best night’s sleep ever!”
Kathy then whispers to him, “I actually felt like you were holding me.”

On the way to school, Kathy tells Eddie from deep within her heart, “I’m sorry I broke down last night. Really, I am.” Eddie replies to her, “no. Please don’t be sorry. If that is you, just be you.” Kathy warmly replies to him, “you are so sweet. Everyone expects you to act a certain way, and sometimes you just can’t.” Reassuring Kathy, Eddie tells her, “just be who you are. Anything else would be a fake.” Eddie then whispers to her, “I want to know the real you.”

Eddie continues, saying, “can you imagine telling Braden to speak using proper English? That’s just not him.” Kathy, finishing Eddie’s thoughts, translates Braden’s pre-race energetic rants into proper English, “my fellow team members, I do perceive that we are going to beat the opposing team by a significant margin, unmatched in either speed or stamina. And, as an added bonus, I shall figuratively place my foot into a very personal posterior part of their anatomy using great force. And then, I shall inform the opposition of our superior performance level and compare it with their inferior performance level using an abundance of very descriptive metaphors.” Eddie laughs, and says with an energetic voice, “we’re going to,” and Kathy, knowing where this is going, joins in, and they both say, “kick ass.” They have a good laugh together, and have a wonderful start to their day.

Before Spring track tryouts begin, Mahoney is trying to find out all he can about Eddie and his friends. After following Eddie and Kathy around all week, Mahoney continues his investigation by talking with anyone who might know something about Eddie’s training protocols. He also attempts to find out more about Eddie’s family, prying information out of anyone he can. Mahoney’s behavior would essentially classify him as a stalker.

Mahoney, who was literally left in the dust during the indoor track season, cannot let this happen again during the Spring. It is apparent to all that Eddie and his friends have some sort of secret, or train in a way that enhances their running. While Mahoney does not find out much about their training, he does come across what he considers interesting information about Eddie. Mahoney, who is still obsessed with Kathy, intends to find out more.