

Eddie, The Freshman Year

Chapter Seven The Spring Season

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With the team members selected, and only a few days to practice before the first meet, the team has a lot of work to do. Before the first practice session, Mr. Frazier calls a short meeting in the gym. While the team is getting ready, there is a lot of chatter in the locker room about who is running in which event. Most of the runners have only been assigned to one event, with some assigned to two events. Discussing the issue amongst themselves, they come to every conclusion except for the right one, which is that Mr. Frazier has simply not decided yet.

The team takes a seat on the bleachers. Mr. Frazier walks in with Mr. Zunde, Barbara, Kathy, and Paula. Mr. Frazier then addresses the team, telling them, “many of you have delivered a stellar performance during tryouts. If you have excelled in an event, I have assigned you to that event.” Many of the runners cheer. Mr. Frazier continues, telling the team, “Bobby B. has delivered a performance better than any freshman that I can remember in the shot-put.” Giving some good news, Mr. Frazier then announces, “the 4 by 440 relay team that took first place in the State meet during the Winter season will be running that event again during the Spring.” Mahoney is heard saying, “second place,” under his breath when Mr. Frazier made that announcement. Mr. Frazier continues to deliver a considerable amount of good news to his team.

Moving on to news that is not so good, Mr. Frazier informs the team, “I also have some bad news, which is that some of you have not delivered a stellar performance.” Mr. Frazier then explains, “for some of you, your relay handoff gives me the impression you had three or four beers before tryouts yesterday.” Someone seated in the back makes the comment, “yeah. Like Mahoney.” The whole team starts laughing hysterically. Mahoney, in self defense, blames his poor handoff skills on Braden again, saying, “that was Braden’s fault.”

Mahoney's comment fires up Braden, who abruptly stands up, taking control of Mr. Frazier's meeting. Braden, pointing to Mahoney, yells out, "that was your fault because you didn't get your fat ass moving fast enough! That's because you sit on your ass all day long! You sit on your ass in your hot shit car! You sit on your ass in class! And you even sleep sitting on your ass! And now, you even run sitting on your fat ass!" Mr. Frazier allows Braden to continue, seeing what else he may have to say.

Braden continues, "I get up in the morning, lift weights, run for a half hour, get a shower, and then I walk to school." Braden now has Mr. Frazier's complete attention and interest. Going further, Braden shouts out, "then I come to practice, walk home, and lift more weights when I get home." Pointing right at Mahoney, Braden then exclaims, "I don't work my damn ass off so you can sit on yours!" Braden finishes his dissertation, by telling Mahoney, "and if you can't grab that baton, next time I am gonna shove the baton right up your fat ass!" Half the crowd cheers, and the other half laughs. Braden then takes his seat. Mr. Frazier continues Braden's dissertation, telling the runners, "and, with that kind of working out and enthusiasm is how the 4 by 440 relay team won State!"

After Braden's pep talk, Mr. Frazier instructs Mr. Zunde, Barbara, Kathy, and Paula to take the team to the track. He then tells Braden, Eddie, Mark, and Johnson to remain behind. On the way out, Mahoney mentions to Bell, "good. Now they're really in trouble." Meanwhile, back on the bleachers, Johnson tells Braden, "uh oh. Now you did it." Braden tells Johnson, "I wasn't even done! Mahoney couldn't even make the middle school track team. What's he even doing here?" Mark tells the group, "don't worry. The problem's Mahoney's anyway." Eddie is not worried. He knows the inside scoop from Kathy, which is that Mr. Frazier is not happy at all with Mahoney's performance this year.

Once the team is out of the gym, Mr. Frazier walks over to the bleachers where the gold medalists are seated. Braden, who is somewhat nervous, does not know what to expect from Mr. Frazier. Quite familiar with disciplinary action, Braden is aware that this is how it usually begins.

Mr. Frazier opens by thanking Braden, telling him, "I would like to thank you for your energetic presentation to the team today." Mr. Frazier then confides, "you said things that I want to say but, for obvious reasons, I cannot." He continues, telling Braden, "perhaps you got something through to some of them today." Mr. Frazier then asks Braden, "is that really your workout routine?" Braden replies, "yes, sir. But, sometimes I do more, like on the weekends."

Knowing that Mark must also work out outside of track practice, Mr. Frazier asks him, "during your workouts, what do you do?" Mark replies, "in the morning, I take a run down along the parkway before school. If I

have enough time, I'll lift weights before my shower. Then, I lift weights again, every day before dinner." Mr. Frazier asks, "how about on the weekends?" Mark replies, "sometimes, my father puts me to work." Now quite curious, Mr. Frazier asks, "what does he do?" Mark explains, "he's a jobber. I carry 2 by 4s, help him build stuff, and that kind of thing." Mr. Frazier asks, "what else?" Mark tells him, "I lift weights at least twice over the weekends. But, I usually take Friday evening off." Mr. Frazier cannot believe what he is hearing.

Coming to Johnson, who is the quiet one in the group, Mr. Frazier asks, "Johnson, how about you?" Johnson tells Mr. Frazier, "I lift after school, and then I get a run in before dinner." Mr. Frazier asks, "anything else?" Johnson tells him, "on the weekends, I ride my bicycle a lot. In the Summer, I ride my bicycle to my grandparent's house, cut their lawn, and ride home." Mr. Frazier asks, "how far is that?" Johnson replies, "ten miles, one way." Mr. Frazier asks, "how big is the lawn that you have to cut?" Johnson replies, "it's almost an acre. My grandfather can't do it anymore." Coming to the wrong conclusion, Mr. Frazier asks, "so, you use a riding mower?" Johnson, correcting Mr. Frazier, replies, "no. I use a push mower."

Coming to Eddie, Mr. Frazier asks, "Eddie, how about you?" Eddie replies, "I lift four or five days a week, and ride my bicycle a lot." Mr. Frazier inquires, "please define 'a lot'." Eddie replies, "usually about 50 to 75 miles a week. More over the Summer." Mr. Frazier asks, "what else do you do?" Eddie replies, "I carry Kathy home on my shoulders after school." The group, including Mr. Frazier, laughs over Eddie's commentary. Mr. Frazier asks Eddie, "when do you run?" Eddie tells Mr. Frazier, "I don't like running, so I usually don't. Well, except for when I'm at the beach, where I run a lot in the sand." Mr. Frazier, in amazement, says, "you're the fastest guy in this school, and you don't like to run?" Eddie replies, "I ride my bicycle, swim laps, lift weights, cut eight lawns a week over the Summer, and clean a few pools, so there's not much time to run."

Mr. Frazier tells the group, "well, this certainly explains a lot." Mr. Frazier tells the four runners, "it sounds like the team workouts are nothing for you guys." Mark replies, "well, it's fun." Eddie replies to Mark, "that's only because Paula's there." Mark replies back to Eddie, "until Kathy came along, I was faster than you." Eddie quickly replies, "except for all those times that I beat you." Mark laughs, and tells Eddie, "I don't seem to remember that." Eddie informs Mark, "that's because the sonic boom I made when I passed you damaged your memory, bro." It's not hard for Mr. Frazier to see the synergistic competition between Mark and Eddie.

Braden, who is now a little chilled out, also replies, telling Mr. Frazier, "yeah, well, the team workouts are where I get to kick ass." Mr. Frazier

laughs, and replies, “and you’re doing a great job of it! Just keep doing it!” Mr. Frazier then tells the group, “okay. Let’s get out there and start working.” The four runners and their coach walk out to the track and join the rest of the team.

Out at the track, the first thing Mr. Frazier is working on is finding an alternate in the 100-yard dash. Mr. Frazier arranges a sprint between Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, Bell, and Mahoney. He tells the runners to get ready, and instructs Paula to be the Starter. He instructs Kathy to time the second place runner and Bell. Mr. Frazier will time the first place runner and Mahoney. Assigning the lanes, Mr. Frazier puts Johnson in lane one, Bell in lane two, Braden in lane three, Mark in lane four, Mahoney in lane five, and Eddie in lane six. The placement of the runners is by no means an accident. Mahoney is positioned between the two fastest sprinters in the school, which will hopefully incite him to run faster. The runners set the blocks, and are ready to race.

Mahoney, thinking that Mr. Frazier reprimanded Braden earlier in the gym, comments to Braden, “that’ll teach you to shut up.” Braden immediately gets irritated at Mahoney, and is ready to firmly reprimand Mahoney for his comment. Mark walks over to Braden, and calms him down. Mark whispers to Braden, “I’ll get him. Just watch.”

In a few seconds, Paula commands the runners, “on your marks.” Mark, immediately after Paula says, “set,” tells Mahoney, “one of your laces isn’t tied.” Mahoney looks back to check his laces, and the gun is fired. Everyone is quickly out of the blocks, except Mahoney. The casual observer would think Mahoney’s feet were glued to the blocks.

At the halfway point, Eddie leads, with Mark slightly behind. Johnson and Braden are tied, with Bell a few yards behind. Mahoney, who finally made it out of the blocks, is on his way to delivering a good middle school time. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, followed by Mark. Johnson edges out Braden, taking third place. Bell, taking fifth place, finished not too far behind Braden today. Mahoney, delivering his most embarrassing performance of the year, finishes dead last.

Mr. Frazier and Kathy compare the times. Kathy tells Mr. Frazier, “I got Bell at a 10.8, and Mark at 10 flat.” Mr. Frazier tells Kathy, “I clocked Eddie at a 9.7, but Mahoney ran a 12.9.” Kathy writes down the runner’s times. As she is writing, Mr. Frazier mentions, “I wonder what happened. That’s a really horrible time.” Kathy thinks back about when she told Eddie that Mahoney is getting slower. Giving Mahoney the benefit of the doubt, Kathy replies, “it looks like Mahoney’s times are getting worse. Maybe he’s sick or something.”

While Kathy and Mr. Frazier are talking, Mahoney starts yelling at Mark, attracting a bit of attention. Mahoney scolds Mark, telling him, “you messed up the race! Just shut up already! Stop messing with me!” Mark tells Mahoney, “you got a problem, junior. Eat it.” Mark, not wanting to listen to Mahoney’s rant, walks away, and goes to talk with Paula at the starting line. Mark does not choose to listen to such nonsense. It can lead to nothing constructive. Being ignored by Mark and getting no further attention, Mahoney kicks the ground and punches the air.

Not getting any response from Mark, Mahoney tells Mr. Frazier, “Mark cheated.” Mr. Frazier asks, “oh, yeah? How exactly did Mark cheat?” Mahoney explains, “right before the gun went off, he told me my laces were untied.” Breaking out in laughter, Mr. Frazier says to the senior, “and, you fell for that?” Mahoney boldly replies, “it’s against the rules!” Mr. Frazier counters Mahoney’s argument, telling him, “it’s against the rules to interfere with a runner once the race has begun. There is absolutely no rule against what Mark did, because it occurred before the race began. And, technically, what Mark did does not constitute interference anyway.”

Mr. Frazier then informs Mahoney, “by the way, you ran a 12.9. Get back to the blocks. I’ll give you another chance.” Kathy, who is listening to this conversation, remembers what she told Mr. Frazier yesterday, that Mark and Eddie distract the runner right before the gun goes off. Today, Mr. Frazier got to see first hand how well it works.

After the discussion between Mr. Frazier and Mahoney, Eddie asks Kathy, “what was my time?” Kathy tells him, “a 9.7.” Eddie says, “that’s what I ran last time.” Kathy tells Eddie, “yeah. You’ve had no improvement in the last three days. I guess you’ll have to carry me home every day until you get that time down.” Eddie replies, “then I’ll never get any faster because I like carrying you home.” Kathy replies, “well, so far you only ran 100 yards today. So, you’re definitely going to need another workout.” Kathy smiles and winks at Eddie, as she goes back to work. Mr. Frazier tells Kathy that he is arranging another sprint trial, and instructs her to round up certain runners.

Practice continues for another hour, with Mr. Frazier and his team assistants recording every bit of data they can. After this past Winter’s indoor track season, Mr. Frazier has his eye on the State invitational meet again. This time, however, there will be no fooling around. He will do whatever he can to bring back as many medals as possible. What this means is the better runners will get the events in which they excel. As far as the relay events go, Mr. Frazier will strive to form relay teams that are virtually unbeatable.

With practice finished, the team begins to head to the locker room. Kathy, teasing Eddie, asks, "how many yards did you get in today?" Eddie replies, "not enough." Getting behind Kathy, Eddie raises her onto his shoulders. Kathy whispers to Eddie, "oh my! Eddie! I can't believe you're doing this!" Eddie replies, "I'm going to do this until I run a 9.6."

Paula, walking beside Mark and Eddie, bumps Mark's hip with hers, and asks Mark, "hey. How come I have to walk?" Without missing a beat, Mark lifts Paula onto his shoulders, and carries her back to the school. The two girls, high in the air and next to each other, give each other a high-five. Eddie tells Mark, "I hope she doesn't live far from the school." Mark replies, "she does. I guess I'm in big trouble." Once back to the locker room, they let the girls off of their shoulders, and plan to meet out front in a few minutes.

Kathy and Paula meet out front, waiting for Mark and Eddie. While the guys were getting dressed, Kathy calculated how much time Mark and Eddie actually ran today. Paula asks Kathy, "did you figure it out?" Kathy replies, "yeah. Eddie only ran for two minutes and twenty-five seconds, and Mark ran for a grand total of three minutes and fifty-four seconds." Paula replies, "so, Mark worked out for less than four minutes today?" Kathy answers, "yeah. They are definitely carrying us home." Paula says to Kathy, "this is getting to be kind of fun."

The guys exit the front door, and meet up with Kathy and Paula. Kathy asks Paula, "are you going to tell them, or should I?" Paula replies, "I'll do the honors." Knowing the girls are up to something, Mark mentions, "uh oh. What's up?" Paula tells Mark, "you only worked out for three minutes and fifty-four seconds today, and Eddie only two minutes and twenty-five seconds." Kathy comments, "you can't really call that a workout, now can you?"

Eddie mentions to everyone, "I know exactly where this is going." Eddie gets behind Kathy, and lifts her onto his shoulders, and asks Mark, "what are you waiting for?" Mark then lifts Paula onto his shoulders. Eddie announces, "Kathy's house, in a half mile. Greek food, in three quarters of a mile. Pizza, in about a mile." The girls then yell out in unison, "pizza!" Eddie says, "I knew that was coming." As they walk away, one of the baseball players says to another, "maybe we should have gone out for track. It looks like they're having a lot more fun."

Once they cross the main road, Kathy tells Eddie, "if you want, you can put me down." Eddie tells her, "you don't want me to put you down. You're having way too much fun." As they walk down the sidewalk, many of the drivers honk their horns, and many whistle at the girls. Kathy and Paula wave back at the cars, having more fun than they could have

imagined. No one would ever think that two guys carrying two girls on their shoulders down a busy road would attract so much attention.

Once they get to the pizzeria, someone opens the door for Eddie and Mark. Eddie tells the girls, “don’t forget to duck,” as they walk through the door. Once inside, everyone turns and looks at Kathy and Paula sitting on Eddie’s and Mark’s shoulders. Eddie and Mark let the girls off their shoulders, lowering them to the ground.

Joe, working behind the counter, yells out, “hey! It’s so good to see you guys today!” Joe then asks, “how far did you guys carry your girls?” Kathy replies, “all the way from school!” Joe replies, “wow! You guys must be hungry. I tell you what. If you order two pizzas today, one of them is on me!” Paula tells Joe, “Joe, that is so sweet of you.” Joe replies, “well, you guys brought me some happiness today.”

The group takes a seat, and decides what’s for dinner. While Eddie and Mark go up to the counter and place the order, Paula whispers to Kathy, “I think I’m falling in love with Mark.” Kathy whispers back, “then tell him. Anyone can see the same in his eyes.” Paula replies, “really?” Kathy tells her, “he just carried you a mile on his shoulders. So, think about that for a moment! Stop second guessing yourself.”

The guys return with the drinks and have a seat. The conversation abruptly shifts to the upcoming weekend. Paula asks, “what are you guys doing this weekend?” Eddie, looking at Kathy, replies, “maybe, if the weather is good, we were thinking about a ride to the beach. The water is still a little too cold, but it’s kind of nice there.” Paula asks, “do you guys want some company?” Kathy reluctantly agrees, telling Paula, “sure. That would be great.” Kathy really wanted to go through the portal again, and get the song she loves, *The Power of Love*. She figures that could wait until another day. Dinner arrives, and the guys and gals dig in.

After dinner, everyone walks back in the direction of the school. Kathy mentions, “since you guys just ate, we’ll walk ourselves.” Paula says, “yeah. You shouldn’t work out right after you eat.” Mark suddenly starts laughing. Paula asks, “what is so funny?” Mark says, “maybe, I’ll tell Mahoney the secret to running a good half mile is to eat a whole pizza right before the race. It will get his carbohydrate levels up.” Eddie, Kathy, and Paula also start laughing. Kathy, laughing hysterically, exclaims, “he might just believe that!” Once they get down the road to the corner, the couples say goodbye for the evening. Eddie and Kathy walk to Kathy’s house. Mark and Paula take a right, headed to Paula’s house.

On the way, Kathy asks Eddie, “does anyone else know about the portal?” Eddie replies, “no.” Kathy asks Eddie, “should we tell Mark and Paula?” Eddie explains, “once, I was thinking about telling Mark, but I

thought he'd think I'm crazy. I really trust the guy, but he'd really think I'm crazy." Kathy asks, "how long have you known Mark?" Eddie replies, "since kindergarten." Kathy exclaims, "wow! I've known Paula since kindergarten too! But, yeah. I can definitely see how people might think we're crazy."

Eddie tells Kathy, "use your superpowers!" Kathy asks, "my superpowers? How?" Eddie reminds Kathy, "remember you told me when we were at the beach you can read people really well." Kathy replies, "yeah, that's right! I can do that!" Eddie replies, "so, see if you can figure out if they'll believe it." Eddie suggests, "if you think they'll believe it, we can tell them about it. If not, oh well." Flexing her biceps, Kathy replies, "yeah! I'll use my superpowers!"

Once they arrive at Kathy's house, Kathy appears somewhat disappointed. Eddie asks, "is everything okay?" Kathy tells him, "yeah. Tomorrow's Friday, and I have two tests." Eddie replies, "uh oh. I have one test, and I totally forgot about it." Kathy says, "I've been a real slacker this week." Eddie replies, "yeah, me too. I only ran for how long today?" Kathy smiles, and replies, "exactly two minutes and twenty-five seconds. But, you more than made it up on the way to the pizzeria." Kathy explains to Eddie, "I'd ask you to study with me, but nothing will get done." Eddie asks, "how do you know?" Kathy answers him, "trust me. I know." Kathy and Eddie give a long goodnight embrace, which makes it even harder for Eddie to leave. But, all good things come to a temporary end, and they will see each other in the morning.

The next morning arrives, and Eddie and Kathy walk to school together. Their conversation ultimately comes back to where they left off the night before. Kathy tells Eddie, "okay, so I'm going to see if Paula is going to believe us about the portal." Eddie asks, "how would you know?" Kathy explains to Eddie the best she can, "I don't know how I'll know, but I know that I'll know, if that makes any sense." Eddie replies, "actually, it does."

Eddie then asks, "how about Mark?" Kathy replies, "Mark is easy to read. He'll go along with it if Paula goes." Kathy, who is very observant, relates to Eddie, "Mark is very confident. The only thing he wasn't confident about was believing that Paula liked him. But, he's over that now." Eddie replies, "yeah, you're right about that." When they arrive at school, Kathy tells Eddie, "okay. I'm going to find out today. I will definitely let you know."

Later that day, Kathy and Eddie meet at the front of the school. There is no track practice today, so the team gets a break. This, however, will not stop many of the team members from training over the weekend. With the first meet coming up shortly, everyone must be ready. Kathy

mentions to Eddie, “since there’s no practice today, I’ll give you the day off. You don’t have to carry me.” Eddie replies, “and, I was so looking forward to carrying you! What a bust.”

Kathy, breaking the news to Eddie, tells him, “by the way, Paula will believe us about the portal.” Eddie responds, “awesome!” Kathy then asks, “aren’t you going to ask how I know?” Eddie, remembering yesterday’s conversation, tells her, “I know that you know. It’s your superpower.” Kathy replies, “good. Because I don’t know how I know. I just know. And, I know that I know.”

Just as Eddie and Kathy begin to walk home, Paula walks up, and asks, “are you guys still going to the beach this weekend?” Kathy replies, “yeah! Are you guys coming?” Paula replies, “sure! We’d love to.” Kathy informs Paula, “we have a big surprise for you.” Spilling the beans all at once before Paula can respond, Kathy tells Paula, “we’re going to the beach of the future!” Paula responds, “oh, really?” Kathy smiles, and replies, “yup.” Thinking for a second, Paula tells Kathy, “this is going to be fun. I can feel it.” Eddie reminds Paula, “bring a swimsuit and a towel. We’re going in the water.” Paula, knowing the water is going to be really cold, gives Eddie a weird look.

Feeling that Kathy has something interesting planned, Paula comments, “you guys are definitely up to something.” Kathy, not sharing any more information, just smiles and replies, “yeah, we are.” Paula, who has known Kathy for years, now knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that Kathy has something big planned. Paula also knows that she is not getting any more information out of Kathy until tomorrow, so she doesn’t bother asking. Kathy tells Paula, “when you see Mark, tell him.” Paula replies, “okay. He’s meeting me in a few.” Eddie and Kathy start their walk home, all excited about tomorrow.

The next day, the two couples meet at Mark’s house, since he lives the closest to the parkway. When Eddie and Kathy ride up on their bicycles, Paula is already there waiting. Kathy’s opening line is, “are you guys ready for the trip of a lifetime?” Paula comments to Mark, “see? I told you they’re up to something!” Kathy reassures Mark and Paula, “uh huh, we’re definitely up to something. You’ll see.” Mark comments, “well, whatever it is, I’m game.” Eddie comments, “okay then. Are we all ready?” Paula exclaims, “beach time! Let’s go!” They all get on their bicycles, and head out to the beach.

Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula ride down the road to the parkway. Eddie points to the path so Paula knows where he is going. Mark, of course, knows exactly where the path is and how to get to the beach. Once on the path, Eddie lets Kathy take the lead because he has a tendency to ride faster than most people can. A mile down the road,

Eddie calls out to Kathy, "it's on the right." Kathy pulls off the path, and walks her bicycle up to the portal. Eddie and the rest follow Kathy's lead.

Once they are at the portal, Eddie asks Kathy, "are you going to tell them or me?" Kathy replies, "please, please, please, let me!" Eddie tells Kathy, "sure. Go ahead." Often taking control of the situation, Kathy begins by saying, "okay, ladies and gentlemen, we are about to take a trip into the future." Paula whispers to Mark, "see? She's for real and she's definitely up to something."

Kathy continues, announcing to everyone, "I am your cruise director, Katarina Karakova. Once we get to our destination, nothing will appear the same as it does today. Does anyone have any questions before we enter the time machine?" Mark asks Paula, "do you have my ticket?" Paula laughs, and replies, "I thought you had them!" Kathy asks Eddie, "I wonder if it works for me. Can I try?" Eddie replies, "sure. Do you remember how?" Kathy tells Eddie, "there are just some things that you'll just never forget. This is one of them."

Kathy tells the group, "please follow me to the time portal." Once among the boulders, Kathy tells everyone to hold hands. Kathy asks everyone, "okay, are we all ready?" Paula, knowing Kathy is for real, holds Mark's hand tightly. Kathy, raising her right arm, announces, "June, 25 years from now, in the morning, please."

Kathy then whispers to Eddie, asking, "did it work?" Eddie replies to her, "it sure looks like it. The sky is clearer, it's warmer, and look at the cars," as he points to the parkway. Kathy then announces, "okay, everybody, we're here! Let's go to the beach!" Mark and Paula look around. Paula, after seeing Eddie point to the parkway, also looks at the cars. Paula exclaims, "wow! Check it out!" Mark, previously not knowing what to expect, exclaims, "cool! The trees are all different too!" Mark knows this path better than anyone, for he runs along it nearly every day.

Kathy then announces, "I will be your tour guide for today. Please follow me." Eddie tells Kathy, "if I had to take a wild guess, I'd think you're really enjoying this." Kathy replies, "I sure am!" As she walks back to the path, Kathy tells everyone, "okay everybody, please follow me." Once they get to the path, they all start riding to the beach. The guys let the girls lead the way because today's trip is not a race. On the way, Mark can clearly see things are very different. Paula, however, has not been on the path before. But, she is very aware that something has dramatically changed.

Once they approach the beach, Kathy lets Eddie take the lead. Eddie rides around the turnabout, and takes a left turn. A half mile down the road, they enter the parking lot, which is getting full since it is a nice day.

Eddie rides to the bicycle rack near the concession stand, and they lock their bicycles. Still playing tour guide, Kathy announces, “okay, everyone! We have arrived at our destination. Please enjoy your day at the beach, and travel with us often.” They each get their duffel bags, and head to the water.

Now that they are on the beach, Paula mentions, “wow! Like everyone is dressed all differently. I can’t believe it!” Kathy replies, “yeah! And, listen to the music. It’s stuff we’ve never heard before.” Mark, who is usually on the confident side, exclaims, “wow! I can’t believe this is happening to me!” Kathy tells Mark, “it sounds like you’re about to break out into a Peter Frampton song.” Paula, holding his hand, reassures him, “it is. Trust me. It is.” Eddie tells Kathy, “good, I’m not crazy.” Kathy reassures Eddie, “I never thought you were.”

Mark mentions, “well, the beach looks about the same as the last time I was here.” Eddie replies, “yeah. Ocean and sand. Beaches haven’t changed too much over the last few thousand years.” Kathy bumps Eddie’s hip with hers, and exclaims, “hey! That’s my line!” Eddie starts laughing, with Kathy joining in. Mark finds an open place in the sand, and says to the group, “how about here?” Everyone lays out their towels, and lays out in the sun for a while. Paula mentions, “wow! The music is so different.” Kathy tells Paula, “yeah, I know. I heard this song that I just got to have.” Eddie says, “yeah. *The Power of Love*, by Céline Dion. We still have to get that.”

After a while, Mark asks everyone, “does anyone want to catch some waves?” Eddie replies, “sure,” and they all get up and go into the water. When they walk into the ocean, Eddie tells Kathy, “the water seems the same too. It’s still wet, as usual.” Kathy warmly replies to Eddie’s comment, “I love you so much. You’re so much fun!” They all have a fun time riding the waves. Eddie notices that there are not a lot of people riding the waves today, but most people stay in water up to their knees. After a while, they come out of the water, and dry off. Everyone is hungry after the ride this morning, so lunchtime comes a little early.

The group heads over to the concession stand, and everyone is surprised at the prices on the menu. Paula mentions, “well, we now know what the inflation rate will be over the next 25 years.” Eddie tells everyone, “don’t worry. It’s my treat.” Eddie and Mark order lunch, and the girls find a picnic table.

While they are waiting for the guys, Kathy tells Paula, “what’s awesome is that when we get back, it will be the same time that we left.” Paula replies, “no! You can’t be serious!” Kathy responds, “yeah, we’ll have the whole day ahead of us.” Paula asks, “how long have you known about this portal thing?” Kathy tells Paula, “Eddie showed me earlier this week. He

didn't show me before because he thought that I'd think he's crazy." Paula replies, "yeah, I can see that." The guys return with the food, and they all have lunch.

After lunch, Mark asks, "do you guys care if me and Paula take a walk up the beach?" Eddie replies, "no. Go ahead. We'll just meet back here later." Paula says, "we won't be too long, maybe an hour or so." Kathy thinks to herself, "yeah, right. That's going to be more than a walk." Mark and Paula take a walk down the beach, and Eddie and Kathy lay out on their towels for a few minutes. Eddie and Kathy then decide to go on their own walk.

Kathy and Eddie walk past the concession area, in the opposite direction of Mark and Paula. A little farther down, Kathy finds a group of sand dunes. She says to Eddie, "look! Sand dunes. Let's check them out." They walk in and around the dunes for a few minutes. After looking around, Kathy tells Eddie, "here it is. The perfect spot." She sits in the sand with Eddie, telling him, "no one can see us here." Before Eddie can reply, Kathy embraces her sweetie. They spend the next hour among the dunes, having the private oasis all to themselves. All they hear are waves crashing, and a few seagulls in the background.

More than an hour goes by. Eddie and Kathy have no idea how long they've been in the dunes. They get up and walk in the direction of the shore. Making their way through the sand, they are walking like they are a bit drunk. Kathy tells Eddie, "look at what you did to me! I can't even walk straight." Eddie asks, "should I just carry you?" Kathy replies, "only if you don't drop me." Kathy whispers to Eddie, "do you have any idea what you do to me?" Eddie replies, "yeah. You do the same to me." Putting his arm around Kathy, Eddie tells her, "here, we'll just hold each other up." They walk along the shore, making their way back to their towels.

When they find their towels, they also find Mark and Paula laying out in the sun. Eddie mentions to them, "I hope you weren't waiting for us." Mark replies, "no. We just got back." Kathy tells Mark and Paula, "we got lost." What Kathy meant is that she and Eddie got lost in each other. By the way she said that, Eddie knew exactly what she meant. Mark and Paula pretty much figured it out too, because they got lost in the same way. All the sand in Kathy's and Paula's hair gives it away.

After another hour or so of laying out and riding waves, the time comes to make the trip back. Paula asks, "by the way, how do we get back home?" Eddie replies, "we just walk through the portal again." Paula exclaims, "wow! That's really easy." They gather up their stuff, and walk to their bicycles. As Eddie unlocks the bicycles, Paula tells everyone, "this was really fun! This was a great day!" Mark replies, "yeah, I know. The beach is Eddie's Summer hangout." Paula tells Mark, "and, it's going to be

ours too.” Not realizing she likes the beach so much, Paula has just planned Mark’s Summer well in advance. Kathy doesn’t really care where her Summer hangout is, as long as it is with Eddie. They all get on their bicycles, and begin the ride home.

When they come up to the portal, they get off their bicycles and walk up to the boulders. Kathy, being the tour guide for the day, tells everyone, “this ends our trip to the future today. I hope that you had a good time, and travel with us again sometime in the future.” They all walk through the portal, arriving in the morning at the same time they left.

Mark exclaims, “wow! I still can’t believe this!” Eddie suggests, “maybe we can go to the future someday and watch a track meet at the school.” Kathy adds her own suggestion, “I guess you can go to the future, and watch yourself run!” Kathy’s remark makes everyone seriously think about what being able to go to the future means. They all then get on their bicycles again and ride to Mark’s house.

Once they arrive at Mark’s house, they sit on the lawn and talk for a while. Eddie mentions, “well, we still have the whole day ahead of us.” Kathy points out, “yeah! And, look! I got an awesome tan!” Paula still has not fully grasped what they have just experienced. Mark, sitting up against a tree, asks, “I wonder if we can go back in time too.” Eddie already knows the answer, which was given to him by the mechanic. Eddie replies, “yeah, we can.” Mark then suggests, “we can go back to a track meet, and mess with McCrutchen twice as much.” Eddie says to Mark, “then there will be two of you in the same place. That might be a problem.” Paula points out, “that will surely cause a mess.” Kathy adds her two cents, saying, “I think I prefer the beach.” Then she remembers, and tells Eddie, “oh, and we’ve got to get that song!”

Mark then asks, “when is the first meet anyway?” Paula replies, “this coming Wednesday.” Eddie asks, “against who?” Kathy replies, “I think it’s Riverdale.” Eddie then asks, “Riverdale? Why does that ring a bell?” Knowing the competition well, Kathy answers, “Brady. He ran the 40-yard dash at State. He’s mad at you guys.” Eddie replies, “I guess I have a lot of work to do.” Knowing Brady has fallen for the simplest tricks in the book, Mark tells everyone, “I’ll think of a way to work him over good. He won’t win.” Brady, while he is one of the fastest guys in the State, has the problem that his brain is a bit on the slow side, and doesn’t realize he is being messed with until it is too late.

After a while, Kathy asks Eddie, “can we go and get that song, please, please, please?” Eddie replies, sure! How about now? All excited, Kathy tells Mark and Paula, “we’re going back, I mean forward, to get that song. Do you guys want to come?” Paula replies, “I think we’ll hang out here a while.” Mark and Paula seem content sitting under the tree, and don’t

look like they are moving anytime soon. Kathy tells them, “okay. We’ll be back in a while.” Eddie and Kathy then ride off to the portal to seek out Kathy’s treasure.

Once they get to the portal, Kathy asks Eddie, “where are we going to find that song?” Eddie suggests, “we can try the record shop near the mall. Maybe it’s still there in the future.” The record shop is only a short distance from the portal, an easy ride for Eddie and Kathy. They walk with their bicycles among the boulders, and Kathy raises her right arm, saying, “May, 25 years from now, in the afternoon.” They then find themselves where they were earlier this week, and they ride off to the record shop. The record shop Kathy and Eddie will be visiting is an international record store, stocking many releases intended for foreign markets that are not commonly seen in the United States.

When they get to the record shop, they walk in and nothing appears the same. The shop is packed with CDs, which is something totally unfamiliar to Eddie and Kathy. They manage to find a section that still has vinyl records, which is more familiar to them. As they look through the albums, Kathy repeats to herself, “Céline Dion, *The Power of Love*.”

The clerk walks over and asks, “do you need any help?” Kathy replies, “I’m looking for Céline Dion, *The Power of Love*.” Seeing that Kathy is looking in the vinyl section, the clerk asks, “did you want the CD, or the vinyl album? Oh, and we might have the single in the back in 7-inch.” Kathy looks at Eddie, as if the clerk is speaking a foreign language. Kathy asks, “do you have the 45?” The clerk replies, “okay, so you want the 7-inch. Let me check.” While the clerk goes to look, Kathy puts her head against Eddie’s shoulder, telling him, “I really hope they have it.”

The clerk returns, telling Kathy, “we have a 12-inch promotional disc, but not the 7-inch.” Never hearing of a promotional disc, Kathy asks, “what’s that?” The clerk replies, “it’s the same size as an album, but it’s a single. And, it has much better sound quality. They’re made for radio stations, and DJs.” Suddenly happy that they have her song, Kathy tells the clerk, “we’ll take it.”

The clerk goes to the back and retrieves the record. When the clerk returns, they go to the checkout counter. The record cost \$19.95 before tax, which is actually a deal, since the store got it free. It would normally cost more than that, if you could even buy one. The clerk tells them, “that will be \$21.35.” Kathy has a look of surprise when she hears the price. Eddie takes out some money, and hands it to the clerk. The clerk hands Kathy the bag, and Eddie the change, and Kathy has bagged her treasure.

When they get outside, Kathy tells Eddie, “I didn’t mean for you to spend that much.” Eddie tells Kathy, “but, now you have your song. And,

we're going back to listen to it." Neither Kathy nor Eddie has ever heard of a 12-inch promotional single. What they also didn't know is Kathy's \$21.35 single will be worth hundreds of dollars someday. Kathy, so happy that she got her song, cries in Eddie's arms, with tears of happiness. Eddie tells her, "lets go back home and listen to it." They get back on their bicycles, and head back to the portal.

At the portal, they walk through, and are back in their time. Kathy tells Eddie, "okay, we're riding to my house to listen to my song. I hope you can keep up with me." Kathy rides to her house, and is so focused on getting there that she did not realize she rode right past Mark and Paula, still sitting on Mark's front lawn.

When they get to Kathy's house, Eddie mentions to her, "you're really fast on your bicycle." Kathy replies, "well, I really want to hear my song." Eddie replies, "so, I really don't have to carry you." Before Kathy could reply, Eddie tells her, "ha! I got you!" Kathy, caught off guard, says, "yeah! That you did!"

They go inside, and Kathy heads right for the stereo. She puts the record on, and they both sit back and listen. Sitting next to Eddie on the sofa, Kathy is listening to her song with her eyes closed. Tears of happiness and joy flow down her cheeks as she is listening to her song. Eddie lets her listen, being careful not to disturb her when she has her eyes closed.

When the song is over, Kathy plays her song again. This time she stands, taking Eddie by the hand, and they slow dance together. While they are dancing, Eddie whispers to Kathy, "this really is a very beautiful song." Kathy whispers back, "yeah. Thank you so, so much for getting it for me." When the song is over, Kathy sighs, and tells Eddie, "you really made my day."

Kathy and Eddie spend the rest of the day together. Later that day, Mark and Paula come over to Kathy's house to hear the song she loves so much. The four of them listen together, and everyone now knows why Kathy wanted that song so badly. The problem is that, in Kathy's time, Céline Dion did not record the song yet, so Kathy cannot play it for anyone else. In fact, in Kathy's time, Céline Dion is not even in kindergarten yet. Kathy's treasured recording of *The Power of Love* will be her secret, shared by only a few.

Eddie and Mark talk about the upcoming meet, while Kathy and Paula immerse themselves listening to *The Power of Love* again. While discussing the upcoming meet, Eddie mentions to Mark, "Brady is the number one seed in the region. That's going to be a problem." Mark replies, "we'll figure out something." Eddie asks Kathy, "do you know

Brady's best time in the 100?" Kathy replies, "I don't know his best time, but his average is in the mid 9-second region." Eddie tells Mark, "that might be doable."

Thinking about the upcoming meet, Eddie mentions to Mark, "I got to get some training in." Mark replies, "yeah, me too." Kathy, overhearing their conversation, suggests, "if you guys want, you can go train, and we'll sit here and listen to *The Power of Love* some more." Eddie asks, "you don't mind?" Kathy replies, "no. Go ahead." Eddie asks Mark, "do you want to go on a long bike ride?" Mark replies, "yeah. I'll give it a try," as if the 22 miles they rode earlier today were not enough. Eddie and Mark kiss their sweethearts goodbye for the time being and head off to train.

The day of the first meet finally arrives. Not one, but three busloads of students from Riverdale empty out into the parking lot. One bus carried the team, and the other two busses carried spectators. With Brady being the region's number one seed, he has attracted a lot of attention. A few college scouts are also attending the meet today. They will have their eyes on only one person, Brady. This will put a lot of pressure on Brady to run a superb race. From Brady's vantage point, tens of thousands of dollars of scholarship money are at stake. From Eddie and Mark's perspective, it's still all fun and games.

Before the meet, Mr. Frazier has the team meet in the auxiliary gym. Making the team aware of what will be going on behind the scenes ahead of time, he announces, "during today's meet, there will be a lot of spectators for Riverdale. A few college scouts will be also observing today's meet. They will all be looking at Brady." Raising his voice, Mr. Frazier announces, "Mahoney! If you still want a scholarship, today's your chance!"

Mr. Frazier then continues, "Brady is their sprinter. He is the number one seed in the region, and number two seed in the State." Now being well aware of Mark's and Eddie's pre-race activities, Mr. Frazier adds, "anything anyone can do to distract him, go ahead and do it. I want the scouts looking at us, not them! And, Braden! Brady runs the anchor leg in the 4 by 440 relay. You know exactly what to do!" Braden, not missing a beat, exclaims, "we're kicking their ass! I don't care what kind of reputation Brady has! It's going down the toilet, along with his fat ass!" Mr. Frazier then continues, "that is exactly the attitude I want everyone to have when we get out there today!" Mr. Frazier goes over a few other important details with the team before they head out to the track.

As they get ready to walk out to the track, Mark asks Mr. Frazier, "do we know the lane assignments yet in the 100-yard dash?" Mr. Frazier tells Mark, "yes. They've already been assigned." Mark asks, "what lane is Brady in, three or four?" The top seed usually gets one of the inside lanes,

either lane three or lane four. Mr. Frazier replies, "it's probably lane three, since he is the number one seed, but we can check with the Timekeepers." Mark asks, "can you please check for me?" Not daring to ask Mark what he is up to, Mr. Frazier replies, "sure. No problem."

On the way to the track, Kathy tells Eddie some good news. Kathy explains to Eddie, "Brady's best times were all on composite tracks, where he ran with pin spikes." Kathy further explains, "this is a gravel track, so the times are usually a bit slower." Eddie mentions, "a gravel track is all I've ever ran on before indoor track this year." Kathy tells him, "your times will be slightly faster on a composite track."

Once they get to the track, Mr. Frazier checks with the Head Timekeeper regarding the lane assignments for the 100-yard dash. Mr. Frazier reports back to Mark, telling him, "Brady is in lane three, Eddie is in lane four, and you are in lane two." Mark, confirming what Mr. Frazier told him, asks, "are you 100 percent sure that Brady is in lane three?" Mr. Frazier replies, "I saw it on the lineup sheet myself." Mr. Frazier is still hesitant to ask Mark why he needs this information. Mark tells Mr. Frazier, "thanks. I'm going to go and warm up."

Mark catches up with Eddie, telling him, "Brady's in lane three, you're in four, and I'm in two." Eddie tells Mark, "we're up first. Kathy told me that they changed the order of the events because of the college scouts." Mark tells Eddie, "come with me. We're going to run some warm-ups." Eddie tells Mark, "but the meet starts in a half hour." Revealing his plan, Mark tells Eddie, "we're going to work lane three over really good, and loosen up the gravel." Eddie smiles, knowing exactly what Mark is up to. On the way to the starting line, they recruit Johnson and a few others to help. If the gravel on the track is loose, the track will not be as fast compared to compact gravel. Mark intends to loosen up the gravel in lane three, which is Brady's lane.

When they get to the starting line, Mark digs his spikes into lane three, and twists his foot, loosening the gravel. Eddie, Johnson, and a few other team members begin to do the same. They all run a few warm-ups in that lane to further loosen the gravel, but primarily to give the appearance they are doing something reasonably legitimate.

After fifteen minutes of warm-ups, Mark tells Eddie, "let's try it out." Mark suggests Eddie get in lane three, and Johnson in lane one. Mark tells them, "just run 10 yards." Eddie and Johnson get ready. Mark gives the command, "ready, set," waits two seconds, and says, "go." Eddie and Johnson are both out of the blocks fast but, at 10 yards, Johnson is ahead of Eddie, something that has never happened before. Eddie, impressed with Mark's engineering skills, tells Mark and Johnson, "let's just pace up

and down lane three, drag our spikes, and loosen it up even more until the race.”

The Head Timekeeper, who is also serving as the Meet Announcer, notifies everyone that the meet will begin in five minutes. He tells the coaches that the 100-yard dash will be the first race. Kathy runs up to Eddie, asking him, “are you ready?” Eddie replies, “I’m ready, and I’m going to win.” Kathy reminds Eddie, “remember, don’t let your guard down. Brady is the number one seed.” Eddie replies, “not anymore. I’m the number one seed.” Kathy perceives Eddie is quite confident, and she clearly knows that Eddie, Mark, and Johnson are up to something.

The Timekeeper tells the runners to get ready. Brady, who recognizes Mark from the indoor track season, says to him, “you’re not messing up this race.” Mark replies, “I don’t have to. You already messed it up yourself.” That is not exactly what a runner wants to hear 30 seconds before the gun goes off, especially when there are several college scouts watching. Brady’s emotions are now on shaky ground, just like the lane he is about to run in. Mark, Eddie, and Johnson, however, are very confident.

Meanwhile, about twenty yards from the finish line, standing back from the track, are the college scouts. Each scout has their position from where they prefer to watch the race. One scout will even be filming the race. The bleachers have a significant crowd, considering this is a regular season track meet. Riverdale’s two bus loads of spectators are all waiting for the meet to begin. Today, the 100-yard dash is the main event.

Once the runners appear ready, the Starter announces, “on your marks.” The runners position themselves in the blocks. A few seconds later, the Starter announces, “set.” Brady, in lane three, is physically set, but not mentally. The gun goes off, and the runners are out of the blocks.

After ten yards, Eddie is in the lead. Mark is slightly behind Eddie, with Johnson and Brady tied. Halfway through the race, at 50 yards, Eddie is clearly in the lead, with Mark in second place. Johnson progresses to third place, and Brady is now in fourth place. Brady has now lost all confidence in himself. Brady begins to pick up some speed at about 75 yards, probably because the gravel is more compact. Eddie, knowing he is going to win, begins to pick up even more speed than Brady. At the finish line, Eddie is the clear winner. Mark takes second place. Johnson slightly edges out Brady and takes third place. Brady, taking fourth place, lost the race, any scholarship he had hoped for, not to mention his confidence.

Learning from Zaino over the indoor track season, Eddie does not care what his time is. Eddie, and the other two winners, cool down and return

to the finish line. On the way, Mark passes Brady, telling him, "I told you that you messed it up." Brady returns the serve, angrily telling Mark, "shut up." Mark, taking the upper hand in the psychological warfare, ignores Brady's comment. Mr. Frazier, who is more excited than a kid at Christmas time, congratulates the three runners. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara also congratulate Eddie, Mark, and Johnson with high-fives. Kathy and Mr. Frazier make their way to the Head Timekeeper to find out the runners' times.

The scouts also approach the Head Timekeeper, attempting to discover the runners' times. The other Timekeepers attempt to keep the scouts away. Once the times are compiled, the Head Timekeeper makes the long awaited announcement, "Edward Bogenskaya, 9.6 seconds. Mark Svoboda, 9.8 seconds. Eric Johnson, 9.9 seconds. John Brady, 10.0 seconds. Alan Green, 10.8 seconds. And Vincent Clark, 11.0 seconds."

After the announcement, the scouts surround Mr. Frazier. The scouts are desperately trying to get any information they can about Eddie, Mark, and Johnson. Mr. Frazier makes the announcement, "our three winners today are all freshmen. Please come back in three years." The Riverdale coach, hearing that Eddie, Mark, and Johnson are all freshmen, is beginning to look a little frightened.

Kathy comes up to Eddie again, telling him, "you did it! You beat your best time and the number one seed!" Eddie replies, "yeah! A 9.6! So, now I don't have to carry you anymore?" Kathy replies, "yeah. But, you know you will." Eddie exclaims, "yeah. I know. Because you like it!" Recalling that this is a track meet and not just practice, Eddie then tells Kathy, "oh, and I'll have to carry you back to the school after the meet, since I'm only running 540 yards today."

Mark and Paula then walk up and join Eddie and Kathy. Kathy then asks, "okay, what were you guys up to?" Eddie asks, "when?" Kathy tells him, "before the race. You, Mark, Johnson, and a bunch of the guys were definitely up to something." Eddie replies, "we were warming up, and loosening up the gravel in lane three, Brady's lane." Kathy replies, exclaiming, "you didn't!" Mark confesses, "we all ran our warm-ups in lane three, and loosened it up more by twisting our spikes into the gravel." Kathy starts laughing, and asks, "okay, whose idea was this?" Mark replies, "it was mine. I'll take the blame." Paula starts laughing along with Mark, attracting a bit of attention.

All of the hysterical laughter prompts Mr. Frazier to walk over and investigate what could possibly be so funny. Mr. Frazier walks over, and asks, "let me in on it. What's going on?" They explain to Mr. Frazier how they loosened up the gravel in Brady's lane, and Mr. Frazier also begins to laugh hysterically. Mr. Frazier then comments to Mark, asking, "so, that's

why you wanted to know what lane Brady will be in.” Mark replies, “exactly.” Still laughing hysterically, Mr. Frazier informs them, “well, I’m not aware of any rule regarding everyone warming up in the same lane!” Mr. Frazier then moves on to the 4 by 880 relay, which is already in progress.

For the next hour, the meet runs smoothly and progresses rather well. Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson are getting ready to run the 4 by 440 relay. Meeting with the 4 by 440 relay team before the event, Mr. Frazier informs them, “any one of you can beat Brady in a 440. There are two runners we haven’t seen before today. So, don’t let your guard down.” Mr. Frazier mentions, “one of them beat Mahoney in the half mile earlier today.” Braden comments, “that ain’t saying too much.” Mark asks, “did he beat Mitchell?” Mr. Frazier replies, “no. Mitchell ran a very smart race.” Mr. Frazier tells them to get ready, as they make their way to the starting line.

The scouts will be watching the 4 by 440 relay as well. Brady has one last chance at impressing the scouts. Although he is a good sprinter, Brady is not very competitive at running 440 yards. One of the Riverdale 4 by 440 relay team members was also on the indoor track season. The other two are presumably faster than the runners they replaced. Brady’s relay teammates are intending to help him look good in the 4 by 440 relay. Eddie and his teammates, on the other hand, are intending to make Brady look as bad as possible.

The teams are ready to run, with the runners congregating around the transition zone. Braden starts exclaiming, “whose ass am I kicking today? Which one? Who’s up for a major league ass kicking?” Mark points over to the Riverdale relay team, telling Braden, “the one with his laces untied.” Three of the four Riverdale runners, including Brady, look down and check their laces, which is not exactly a sign of confidence. Mark gets the baton from Paula, who tells him right in front of the opposition, “you’re going to beat him. Don’t worry.” This causes some worry in the opposing runner.

The Starter tells the runners, “on your marks.” Mark takes his time to get into the blocks, staring down the opposing runner. Mark then points his baton at the opposing runner, who is now even more worried than he was after Paula’s comment. Mark gets positioned, and the Starter announces, “set.” The gun goes off, and the runners are out of the blocks.

Mark takes the lead, yet another event to erode the opposition’s confidence. Mark continues to enhance his lead over the entire leg. Meanwhile, at the transition zone, Braden also erodes Riverdale’s confidence, yelling, “Mark’s kicking their ass big time! That guy ain’t gonna have an ass left when this is all over!”

Approaching the transition zone, Mark hands off to Johnson. Johnson has a comfortable lead, but he is up against one of Riverdale's unknowns. Braden continues, exclaiming, "and, Johnson is kicking ass too!" Johnson maintains the lead throughout his leg, with no discernable change in distance between the two runners.

Johnson hands off the baton to Eddie. As Eddie receives the baton, he hears Kathy scream, "go Eddie!" Kathy's voice motivates Eddie even more. During Eddie's leg, Braden gets even more fired up. Braden exclaims, "these guys aren't leaving me any ass to kick! Why don't they put me up against someone who can run!" Brady, as he is looking over at Braden, prompts Braden to exclaim, "if I walk around the track, we'll still win!" Braden gets onto the track, ready to receive the baton from Eddie.

Braden takes the baton, and is long gone before Brady receives his baton. Braden is running at his sub-60 quarter mile pace, far faster than he needs in order to win. Mark mentions to Eddie and Johnson, "it looks like we got this one wrapped up." Eddie agrees, telling Mark, "Braden's doing what he said he's going to do." Eddie, Mark, and Johnson all shout in unison, "kick ass!"

With Mr. Frazier distracted, one of the scouts approaches Eddie. The scout pulls Eddie aside, and asks, "are you Eddie Bogenskaya?" Eddie replies, "yeah. That's me." The scout then asks Eddie, "would you be interested in a free college education?" Not giving the scout much attention, Eddie frankly replies, "no." The scout asks, "may I ask why not?" Eddie replies, "because I'm going to be a mechanic." Eddie walks away from the scout, and focuses his attention back on the race, ignoring the scout.

Overhearing the brief discussion with the scout is Mahoney, who thinks to himself, "oh, so he wants to be a mechanic. That's it? A mechanic?" Mahoney shakes his head and laughs. After all, Mahoney wants to follow in his father's footsteps and be an attorney. It is not the fact that Eddie wants to be a mechanic that irritates Mahoney, but that Eddie is the star sprinter of the team.

Back on the track, Braden is approaching the finish line, with Brady too far behind to matter. With 50 yards left, Braden sprints to the finish line even though he could have run backwards from that point and still beat Brady. Braden crosses the finish line first, and the team celebrates not only winning the race, but the meet as well. The relay team members exchange high-fives with each other, congratulate each other, and walk away from the finish line just as Brady crosses.

At the end of the meet, the coaches and runners shake hands. Mark and Brady's path cross again, but this time Brady is a bit more cordial.

Brady tells Mark, “congratulations. I don’t know where you guys came from, but congratulations.” Mark replies, “hey, thanks.” Things begin to wind down rapidly. The spectators head to their busses, somewhat disappointed in their team’s loss. Riverdale’s team also heads to their bus, more disappointed than the spectators.

Eddie meets up with Kathy, who lands on Eddie’s shoulders in no time. Paula didn’t take too long to end up on Mark’s shoulders either. They walk to the locker room together with the rest of the team, celebrating the season’s first victory. Kathy asks Eddie, “what did that scout want?” Eddie replies, “he said he wanted to give me a free college education.” Kathy asks, “what did you tell him?” Eddie explains, “I just told him no, and that I wanted to be a mechanic.” Kathy replies, “good for you!”

On the way to the locker room, Paula suggests, “hey, let’s all go out and celebrate!” Kathy replies, “I’ll go if Eddie carries me!” Eddie replies, “hey, I ran a 9.6!” Kathy replies to Eddie, “yeah, well, you only ran 540 yards today, and that’s hardly a workout.” Without any hesitation, Eddie agrees, telling Kathy, “okay, I’ll carry you.” Kathy then tells Eddie, “that’s okay, I was only teasing you.” Mark suggests, “why don’t we see if Braden, Johnson, Mitchell, and Bobby B. want to go too?” The girls agree, and suggest they also ask Barbara. Eddie mentions, “Wendy is probably around somewhere too.” Mark then says, “we’ll see who wants to go, and then we’ll meet out front.” Paula replies, “I’ll try to hunt down Wendy.” Eddie replies to Paula, “when you find Wendy, you’ll also find Braden.”

After they get dressed, everyone meets out in front of the school. Mark asks, “okay, where are we going?” Paula and Kathy both reply, “pizza!” No one objects, so they all head down the road to the pizzeria. Eddie puts Kathy on his shoulders. Kathy exclaims, “oh my! Eddie!” Eddie tells her, “well, you wanted to be carried.” Mark then puts Paula on his shoulders, followed by Braden putting Wendy on his shoulders.

Barbara, feeling somewhat left out, says to Kathy, Paula, and Wendy, “you guys have it made.” Johnson makes the offer to Barbara, “hey, I’ll carry you if you want.” Barbara happily replies, “sure,” as Johnson is already lifting her onto his shoulders. Johnson remarks, “so this is how you guys work out.” Eddie replies, “yeah. It sure beats pumping iron.” As they are walking down the road, Mahoney drives by in his car with Ambrosini. Mahoney, full of bitterness, looks over at the group knowing exactly where they are going.

They approach the pizzeria, and Mitchell opens the door for the group. Kathy reminds everyone, “okay, don’t forget to duck!” The group walking in brings a big smile to Joe’s face. Joe yells out, “this looks like a celebration! Did you guys win?” Kathy and Paula yell out in unison, “oh, yeah!”

Since the group is large, Joe tells them to have a seat where there are a few empty tables, and someone will take their order. Joe exclaims from behind the counter, "I tell you. If I charged by the smile, I could retire when all you guys come in!" Everyone has a seat, with the group spread over several tables. On the other side of the pizzeria are Mahoney and Ambrosini. Eddie and his group have not even noticed them.

After the group arrives, the energy level in the pizzeria rises tremendously. Once they are all settled in, Joe calls out to them, "what did you guys win?" Mark replies for the group, "everything!" Everyone decides what they are going to have for dinner. Most people decide to split a pizza with someone. Bobby B., the shot doc, decides to order a whole pizza for himself today. Kathy notices that Johnson and Barbara are seated at a table for two, located right next to her table. Kathy, who is very observant, knows long before everyone else that this seating arrangement was not by accident.

Arianna, the waitress, comes over, and sits with the team as she takes their order. The group orders several pizzas, drinks, and a few large salads that they will split. High-fives continue at the tables as the team recounts their victories. Joe, himself, even comes over to the tables and personally congratulates everyone. Mahoney, seated across the floor with his buddy, wonders to himself why Eddie and his tribe get first class service and so much attention.

After the one hour long dinner and celebration, everyone heads outside and says their goodbyes for the day. The group then heads out in different directions. Kathy is quick to notice that Johnson and Barbara walk away together. Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula head in the direction of the school. On the way, Kathy mentions, "did anyone catch Barbara and Johnson?" Eddie remarks, "no. What's up?" Mark replies, "Barbara is what's up. Up on Johnson's shoulders." The group has a good laugh, then Paula comments, "I saw that. They certainly were into each other over dinner." It's funny how the girls notice this kind of thing, but it flies right over the guys' heads at 10,000 feet.

For the next few weeks, the team practices together, and wins every one of their meets. By now, news has gotten around the region that the Northside High School track team is not to be taken lightly. The goal of the opposing teams is to walk away from the meet at least winning in some event. Mr. Frazier senses that this season is only the beginning of his success. Mr. Frazier, who recently visited the middle school during a track meet with Kathy, got a first hand look at next year's upcoming talent. Jimmy Hoffer, who will join the team next year, has delivered some promising times. Mr. Frazier has also identified a few other athletes who will make good additions to the team.

The end of the school year also brings the final meet of the year. This meet is against the team's arch rival, which is Centerville. Shortly after the final meet will be the State invitational meet, which Mr. Frazier and several of his star athletes will be attending. Eddie will be running the 100-yard dash in the State invitational meet. There is no doubt that Mark and Eddie will be up against McCutchen again in some event. Mark, Braden, Johnson, Mitchell, and Bobby B. will all be there as well.

The day of the Centerville meet arrives, which is after school on the home track. Eddie walks into English class, and is almost late. Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. are already seated. Braden asks Eddie, "another late night with Kathy?" Eddie replies, "yeah. School has really been getting in the way of life." Mark asks Eddie, "do you got enough energy for the meet this afternoon?" Eddie replies, "I have all day to rest. And hey, look who's talking!" Mark has been spending a lot of late nights with Paula, and Braden has been spending a lot of time with Wendy. All guilty of late nights, none of them dare to continue this conversation.

Miss Starr walks in, telling the class, "everyone, please place your books on the floor, and we'll get started with the test." Braden whispers to Eddie, asking, "we got a test?" Eddie replies, "yeah. Wendy didn't tell you?" Braden replies, "no, she didn't." Braden adds, "dang. I don't even have a pencil. And, it's not even Friday! It's Wednesday! Nobody gives a test on Wednesday." Eddie tosses Braden a pencil, which immediately catches Miss Starr's attention.

Miss Starr tells Eddie, "Eddie, please don't throw a pencil to someone. You can put somebody's eye out." Stressed because he was unaware of the test, Braden whispers under his breath, "that's a bunch of bullshit." Catching Braden's comment, Miss Starr asks Braden, "Axel Braden, would you please elaborate further on your comment?" Braden bluntly replies, "yeah. Throwing a pencil doesn't put somebody's eye out." Braden throws back a question to everyone, "how many people do you see who are walking around with their eye put out?" Answering his own question, Braden replies, "none. Nobody. Not a single one." Braden then exclaims, "we've been hearing this since kindergarten, and I ain't seen one person yet who has their eye put out from a pencil!" The whole class laughs, including Miss Starr. Miss Starr should have seen something like this coming from Braden, but she rides with the tide and goes with the flow.

After the test, the pressure is off. Eddie and the rest can relax before today's meet. The word around school is that, during today's meet, there will be a rematch between Eddie, Mark, and McCutchen. Eddie and Mark both beat McCutchen badly last year in middle school. McCutchen, wanting to vindicate himself, has been training harder. He will not settle for anything less than first place today. Not losing a race all Spring, Eddie is not about to begin losing today either.

After school, Mr. Frazier calls a short meeting in the auxiliary gym, with Kathy, Paula, and Barbara joining him. Mr. Frazier starts by announcing who will be running each event. The team assistants then follow, giving insight regarding the competition. Mahoney, who will be running the half mile, and a subsequent half mile leg in a relay, is not happy at all. He still has his eyes on a scholarship, but has come up empty handed thus far.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Frazier asks, “does anyone have any questions?” Mahoney replies, asking, “is there any chance that I can run the 100-yard dash today?” Mr. Frazier knows that this is Mahoney’s last meet. Mahoney has not been able to deliver a competitive time in the 100-yard dash all year, so Mr. Frazier simply replies, “no.” The team then heads out to the track, with Mahoney infuriated.

Eddie, Mark, and Johnson will be up in the 100-yard dash right after the hurdles. On the way out to the track, Eddie asks Mark, “do you have any idea what you’re going to do to mess with McCutchen?” Mark replies, “I don’t know. I hadn’t figured it out yet.” Johnson suggests, “maybe, he’ll just lose without any help.” Mark replies, “yeah, he will. But, that will take the fun out of it.” Johnson suggests, “maybe we can work his lane over like we did to Brady that time.” With a stroke of genius, Mark tells Eddie and Johnson, “I got it! When the Starter says ‘set,’ I’ll whisper ‘go.’” While Mark’s plan sounds simple, it is enough to throw the runner off. Eddie replies, “you might not be next to him.” Johnson replies, “we’ll figure that out at the starting line.”

The 100-yard hurdles event is up first. Eddie, Mark, and Johnson hang out around the starting line, waiting for their event. Prior to the race, Mark asks the Starter, “can you tell me what lane I’m in?” The Starter replies, asking, “what’s your name?” Mark replies, “Mark Svoboda, in the 100-yard dash.” While the Starter looks down the list, Mark looks with him, and sees that McCutchen is in lane two. Mark sees that Johnson is in lane one and Eddie in lane four. The Starter tells Mark, “it looks like you’re in lane three. Good luck.”

Mark returns to his group, telling them their lane assignments, announcing, “yo, Johnson, you’re in lane one. I’m in lane three, and Eddie is in four.” Then Mark gives everyone the good news, telling them, “McCutchen is in lane two, surrounded by us.” Eddie replies, “awesome!” Mark tells the group, “I haven’t decided what I’m going to say yet. But, whatever I say, just ignore me.”

As the 100-yard hurdles event is underway, Eddie observes that the Starter holds the gun in the air. Eddie shares this information with Mark and Johnson. Eddie and his group know the Starter should have the gun

behind his back where no one can see it. When they see the Starter's finger begin to move, they have a slight edge getting out of the blocks.

Once the hurdlers are near the finish line, the 100-yard dash warriors approach the blocks. Eddie, Mark, and Johnson set the blocks to their liking as the hurdles are removed from the track. While he is setting up his blocks, Mark mentions to McCutchen, "by the way, these are nonstandard blocks. Your settings might be a little off." McCutchen looks at Mark, not knowing whether to believe him or not. Eddie, overhearing Mark's comment, winks at Johnson, telling him, "don't forget to add three to your setting numbers." Johnson, figuring out Mark's plan, pretends to adjust his blocks. This gives much more credence to Mark's comment. McCutchen checks his blocks, and makes some unnecessary adjustments.

The Starter tells the runners, "on your marks." McCutchen gets himself ready, quickly realizing he should have left the blocks alone. The Starter announces, "set." Eddie, Mark, and Johnson have their eyes on the Starter's finger, watching for it to move. Turning toward McCutchen, Mark whispers, "go." McCutchen turns his head for a second to look at Mark. Just as the gun goes off, Mark, Eddie and Johnson are out of the blocks, with McCutchen fooled not once, but twice this time.

At 25 yards, with six men in the field, it appears to be yet another three-man race. At 50 yards, one of the Centerville runners is closing in on Johnson, prompting Johnson to run faster. Eddie and Mark now hear too many footsteps behind them for comfort, so they give it all they have. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, with Mark right behind him. Johnson takes third place, and the Centerville runner following closely behind takes fourth place. McCutchen finishes in last place, which is quite a surprise to his teammates.

At the finish line, after sweeping the event, the team has a brief celebration. Kathy smiles, and tells Eddie, "you ran a 9.7. It looks like you're back to carrying me again." Eddie replies, "oh good! It looks like I'll be carrying you then until next year's season." Kathy reminds Eddie, "but, there's the State meet." Eddie replies, "State doesn't count. It's not a regular season meet." Kathy, all excited, tells Eddie, "awesome! A whole Summer of carrying me around!"

Eddie has learned from Louis Zaino that, in some races, you only run as fast as you need to win. Louis explained to Eddie that if you try to set a record every race, you'll be more prone to injury. Eddie could have run faster, but to risk injury before the State invitational meet would not be wise. Zaino, a seasoned runner, will be going to the State invitational meet with the mile medley relay team this year. This is the same mile

medley team that medaled in the State invitational meet during the indoor track season.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson have a while before the final event, the 4 by 440 relay. Eddie goes over to talk with Bobby B., who is currently in second place in the shot-put event. Bobby B. was only about two feet shy of the senior, Matt Wood, in his first two attempts. Eddie asks Bobby B., "how's it going?" Bobby B. replies, "well, we're going to win. They have nothing. So, now it's between me and Matt." Eddie replies, "oh, really?" Bobby B. explains, "yeah. At the beginning of the season, I was four to five feet down. Now I'm only a foot behind Matt on average." Eddie tells Bobby B., "wow! That's really impressive." Giving Bobby B. a high-five, Eddie tells him, "I'll be right back."

Eddie remembers from gym class how Bobby B. was able to squat more weight when he was being cheered on. Eddie thinks that might just work with the shot-put too. Eddie rounds up a few idle runners, including Mark, Johnson, and Braden. Mitchell is about to run the mile which will take a few minutes. So, everyone else has a little time to spare. Eddie tells them, "let's go cheer for Bobby B. during his last attempt." They all head to the center of the track where the field events are held.

Eddie asks Bobby B., "when are you up?" Bobby B. replies, "I'm next. It's my third attempt." The runners gather around the circle, as close as the Field Judge will allow. When Bobby B. picks up the shot, they all start cheering, "Bobby B.! Bobby B.! Bobby B.!" The cheering gets louder as the shot doc gets into position. Being watched and hearing his name over and over gives the shot doc a little extra energy. Bobby B. hurls the shot-put with all the energy he can find, letting out a primal scream that turns the heads of both teams and some of the officials.

Two Field Judges measure the distance, with one of them recording it on paper. The Field Judge tells Bobby B., "congratulations! You're in first place. Your throw was five feet, eight inches better than your first attempt." The runners all give Bobby B. high-fives for what would later be known as the first place throw of the afternoon.

Eddie, and the rest of the runners, head back to the track just in time to watch Mitchell win the mile. Also watching the mile is Mahoney, who looks over at Eddie and his tribe with disgust. Mahoney will be glad to get this season over with. His senior year has been one dismal failure after another, both on the track and off. Mahoney forgets that this is a team. Mahoney is not a team player. He is in it for himself. Mahoney had only one goal this year, which was to get a track scholarship, which he failed to procure. He blames Eddie and his tribe for his failures. It has never crossed Mahoney's mind that his own performance might be the real reason he did not get a track scholarship.

The time comes for the final event of the afternoon, the 4 by 440 relay. The runners gather near the starting line. McCutchen looks over at his chief adversary, Mark. Last year, in middle school, McCutchen was the anchorman in this event. This year, in Spring track, McCutchen is the lead-off man. This means McCutchen will be up against Mark once again. McCutchen has been thrown off base many times in the past by Mark. Mark's presence is now all it takes for McCutchen to get distracted.

The Starter tells the runners to get ready to run. Paula hands the baton to Mark, and gives him a good luck kiss, which is noticed by everyone around. McCutchen, just seeing Mark and Paula embrace each other, is again distracted. The Starter tells the runners, "on you marks," as McCutchen looks at Mark, wondering what he has up his sleeve for this race. Mark, ignoring McCutchen, gets ready. The Starter announces, "set," followed by the gun going off. Mark takes off so fast, seemingly leaving McCutchen at the starting line. Mark proceeds to give McCutchen his last running lesson of the regular season.

Johnson, who is talking with Barbara, is up next. Barbara sees Paula's good luck kiss gave Mark an edge, so Barbara gives Johnson a good luck kiss too. This is a surprise to everyone, but not to Kathy. Kathy knew that Johnson and Barbara were an item a while ago. Johnson gets on the track, and receives the baton from Mark. Next up is Eddie. Kathy will not allow Eddie to get on the track without his good luck kiss. Kathy gives Eddie a good luck kiss, which prompts the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, to complain to the Head Timekeeper. The Head Timekeeper reluctantly tells Mr. Frazier, "please have your team cool it a little." Mr. Frazier reminds the Head Timekeeper, "no rule has been broken." Mr. Frazier reacts by telling Braden, "get fired up! This is it! The last race of the season." Eddie receives the baton from Johnson, and is off to run his lap.

Braden, following Mr. Frazier's instruction, gets all fired up. While Eddie is running his leg, Braden is shouting, "where's my good luck kiss? What do you mean that I got to run this leg without a kiss? I got to kick ass all by myself, with no kiss? If I don't get my kiss, my foot is going to kiss someone's ass!" Wendy, in the bleachers, can hear Braden clearly, and blows Braden a kiss. Braden then shouts, "there! I got my kiss anyway!" Braden exclaims, "now, I'm ready to kick someone's ass!" The Head Timekeeper would have preferred that Wendy kiss Braden versus listening to his rant.

Braden gets on the track, waiting for Eddie to deliver the baton. Eddie arrives at the transition zone, and Braden is gone with the baton in no time. A lot of people from Centerville are glad to see Braden leave. Braden is nearly halfway around the track when the Centerville runner receives his baton. Even after seeing the runner so far behind, Braden maintains his pace. With 50 yards remaining in his leg, Braden turns

around on the track and begins to run backwards. Mr. Frazier is totally amused watching Braden's new running style. Braden crosses the finish line, still running backwards. Even with Braden running backwards, the Centerville anchorman had no chance of catching Braden. It is no wonder Northside and Centerville are rival schools.

The team walks away, not only with its final win of the year, but also an undefeated season. The walk to the locker room again brings Kathy on Eddie's shoulders, Paula on Mark's shoulders, and Barbara on Johnson's shoulders. Mr. Frazier could not be happier after today's meet. On the way to the locker room, the tribe plans for another victory celebration. They will probably end up celebrating in the usual place, at the pizzeria, and agree to meet in the front of the school before they head out together.

Kathy, Paula, and Barbara all wait in the front of the school for the guys to shower and dress. They discuss what a great season the team had, and that next year's team will be even better. They have already decided where the celebration will be, which is no secret to anyone. In a few minutes, Wendy comes out to join them. Kathy tells Wendy that she should have come down from the bleachers and given Braden a good luck kiss during the 4 by 440 relay. They all have a good laugh over that one.

During the discussion, Paula, out of the blue, says, "shit! There's trouble right around the corner." Kathy asks, "how do you mean?" Paula replies, "I don't know. I just feel it." Barbara suggests, "maybe it's just the stress of the day." The conversation then moves back to tonight's celebration.

Mahoney, who is through with track and the team, is the first one out of the locker room. He left without even taking a shower. Mahoney passes by the girls as he walks toward his car. Barbara, putting her hand up to Mahoney for a high-five, says to Mahoney, "awesome season!"

Mahoney, however, does not return Barbara's high-five. Instead, using both of his hands and all of his strength, he shoves Kathy over with enough force to knock Bobby B. to the ground, landing her across the bushes and into the dirt. Paula yells out to Mahoney, "what's the matter with you!" Mahoney yells back, "I'm sick of this shit and all of you!" Wendy yells out to Mahoney, "you're such an asshole!" Mahoney yells back to Kathy, "that guy's father is a jobber and he wants to be a mechanic! I'm going to law school!" Mahoney screams even louder at Kathy, "what the hell are you going out with that guy for? He's a total loser!" Barbara tells the asshole, "just get the hell out of here, you piece of shit!"

Barbara and Paula rush to help Kathy, who is laying in the bushes and in the dirt, to sit up. Kathy, sitting on the ground in the dirt, is in tears. A crowd gathers around, wondering what happened. Paula, Barbara, and Wendy are too involved helping Kathy to bother with the crowd.

Eddie comes out of the school, and sees all of the commotion. Eddie runs over, seeing Kathy sitting on the ground crying. Sitting beside Kathy and holding her, Eddie asks, "oh no, sweetie! What happened?" Kathy, still crying, tries to answer, but is unable. Barbara tells Eddie what happened, explaining, "I tried to give Mahoney a high-five, telling him, 'awesome season'. Then, he shoved Kathy over the bushes and onto the ground." Paula adds, "yeah. I saw it. That jerk hit her pretty hard." Eddie, holding Kathy tightly, reassures her, telling her, "you're going to be okay. Don't worry, sweetie." Kathy, still in tears and unable to talk, just cries and holds Eddie.

After about ten minutes, Kathy calms down a little, and stands up with Eddie's help. Still holding on to Eddie, Kathy tries to say something to him, but can't yet get the words out. Eddie notices Kathy's clothing is torn from landing in the bushes. Eddie tells Mark and Paula, "I'm taking Kathy home. You guys go out without us." The group, however, waits around to make sure Kathy is going to be okay. In a few more minutes, Kathy tells everyone as she is crying, "I'm sorry. Really, I am. You guys just go out without me. I'll be okay." Eddie and Kathy start the long walk home, with their friends walking along with them.

When they approach the corner to make the turn to Kathy's house, the group goes with Kathy and Eddie rather than going to the pizzeria. Kathy tries to convince them to go to the pizzeria and celebrate, but they all choose to walk with Kathy and Eddie over to her house. Mark tells Kathy, "we can just celebrate another time." When they arrive at Kathy's house, Paula suggests, "we can order pizza and all eat it on your back patio. That is, if you're up to it." Kathy, much better than she was a while ago, replies, "yeah. Let's all do that. I'm not letting that moron ruin everyone's evening."

Kathy's father comes outside, wondering why the crowd has gathered in the back yard. Eddie takes him aside, telling him what happened. Kathy's father immediately takes Kathy aside to find out more. Kathy assures him that she is going to be okay, and that she was just an emotional wreck for a while. Kathy's father assures Kathy and Eddie that this incident will not go unnoticed. When someone with a Ph.D., such as Kathy's father, uses the term, "will not go unnoticed," you can be quite sure that a big hammer is about to come down on someone.

The group takes a seat around the pool in the back yard, and orders pizza. While they wait, Kathy sits on Eddie's lap with her head on his

shoulder for a few minutes. Kathy then tells everyone, “hey, everyone! Get bubbly!” Braden is the first to get bubbly, as Kathy put it. Braden exclaims, “I sense a major league ass kicking on the horizon!” Kathy replies, “yeah! And, I’m going to do it myself!”

After hearing Kathy’s comment, everyone starts to get bubbly. Paula asks Kathy, “how are you going to do that?” Kathy stands up, showing everyone her clothing torn by the bushes, and replies, “to start with, this is what I’m wearing to school tomorrow.” Paula whispers to Mark, “if she does that, Mahoney will be lucky to get out of that school alive.” Mark replies to Paula, “that wouldn’t hurt my feelings any.” The conversation returns to the meet, and later to what everyone will be doing this weekend.

The pizza arrives, and the group asks Kathy’s parents to join them. They gladly join the group, finally meeting some of the team members they’ve only heard about until now. Kathy’s father says the mealtime prayer, and offers thanks to the Lord for bringing Kathy home safely, and for her many friends. Over dinner, the group fills Kathy’s parents in on the meet. Kathy’s father is quite amazed at the times the students are delivering on the track.

An Exercise Science professor at the local State University, Kathy’s father jokingly asks the group of athletes, “so, who are my future Exercise Science students?” Barbara, raising her hand as if she were in a classroom, yells out, “me, for one!” Paula, also yelling out, says, “me too!” Johnson also raises his hand, and says, “I’m seriously thinking about it.” Kathy, much to her father’s surprise, raises her hand, telling him for the first time, “surprise! Me too!” Kathy adds, “I was 100 percent sure after this year’s track season.”

Kathy’s father tells an inside joke, saying, “well, next year we’ll be offering a Ph.D. in Hula Hoop.” Kathy, smiling again, replies, “uh oh. My secret is getting out.” Thinking he was joking around, Professor Karakova was surprised to learn that so many in the group are actually interested in Exercise Science and physical education.

Barbara asks Kathy, “what’s this secret of yours?” Kathy replies, “I Hula Hoop, but we call it hooping,” thinking that was the end of the conversation. Barbara then tells Kathy, “please show us! I want to see!” Kathy looks at Eddie, who informs her, “you know you can’t get out of this one.” Kathy replies, “okay. But, nobody gets to laugh.” Kathy goes inside and gets her hoop, secretly hoping that she is not too sore from being shoved to the ground by Mahoney.

Kathy returns with her hoop, and goes out onto the lawn. She starts her routine with the hoop spinning around her waist, which she lowers to

her knees. She then raises the hoop back up to her waist, and reverses the direction of the hoop so fast that no one saw how she did it. Kathy then places one arm behind her back. She raises her arm overhead, and the hoop magically follows, spinning around her wrist. Lowering her arm, she has the hoop spinning around her waist again. In the next move, she places the other arm behind her back, raising the hoop overhead. Kathy then does a vertical split, as she transfers the hoop from her arm to the leg that is over her head. Much to everyone's surprise, Kathy has the hoop rotating around her vertical leg. She transfers the rotating hoop back to her arm, comes out of the vertical split, and returns the hoop to her waist. Kathy stops, telling everyone, "that's what I do!"

Everyone applauds, whistles, and cheers for Kathy. No one had the slightest clue that Kathy had such talent with a Hula Hoop. Even her dad is impressed by her performance.

What started out to be a horrific evening, instigated by a hater, has turned out to be a wonderful evening, full of love. Kathy had no idea that her life long buddies and her newly found friends this year would stand by her so strongly. Kathy will definitely sleep better tonight knowing that her friends care for her so much.

As the evening comes to a close, every one of Kathy's friends give her a big hug before they head out. Braden offers, "if that guy even looks at you, we'll kick his fat ass. We'll drag his flimsy ass across the street from the school and try him out¹." Mark adds, "if he gives you any problems, just let us know. We'll take care of him."

Eddie stays with Kathy for a while, assuring her that everything is going to be okay. They talk for a while longer, and then it comes time for Eddie to go home. Eddie tells Kathy, "I'll be here early to walk you to school, and to your class." Kathy replies, "thank you. That would be really nice." They kiss goodnight, and Eddie walks to the sidewalk.

As Eddie approaches the sidewalk, Kathy yells out to him, "no, wait!" Eddie returns, asking Kathy, "is everything okay?" Kathy tells Eddie, "yeah. But, I want to kick Mahoney's ass." Eddie replies, telling Kathy, "now you're beginning to sound a little like Braden." Kathy laughs, and says to Eddie, "no. Not that way."

As they sit on the front lawn, Kathy asks Eddie, "we can go back in time with the portal, right?" Eddie replies, "yeah." Kathy explains her plan, telling Eddie, "if we get up early tomorrow morning, and meet here, then we can go to the portal after school tomorrow, and meet ourselves

¹ Try him out: Slang for kicking the shit out of someone.

right here.” Thinking for a moment, Eddie replies, “I suppose so.” Kathy replies, “good! We’re doing that.”

Eddie asks, “okay, Katarina. What are you up to?” Kathy replies, “we are going to meet ourselves here in the morning, and go to Mahoney’s house before school. There will be two of me and two of you, and we will scare the crap out of him. That’s how I’m going to kick his ass. And, bring your bicycle.” Eddie asks, “do you want Mark and Paula to help?” Kathy replies, “I don’t think so. This is my battle.” Eddie tells Kathy, “okay. I’ll be here an hour ahead of time. That should give us enough time.” They give each other a goodnight kiss again, and Eddie begins the long walk home.

The next morning, Eddie is waiting for Kathy an hour ahead of the usual time. Kathy comes out of her house to meet Eddie. Eddie asks, “how are you doing?” Kathy replies, telling Eddie, “I’m doing much better than I expected.” Eddie asks Kathy, “now what?” Kathy replies, “we just sit here for an hour.” Kathy tells Eddie, “after school today, we are going to the portal, and our future selves will be riding up right here on our bicycles, and we’ll ride over to Mahoney’s house with them.” They then put Eddie’s bicycle in the garage. Kathy tells Eddie, “okay. Now we just wait.” Eddie asks Kathy, “do you think this will work?” Kathy replies, “I was up for three hours thinking about this. It will work.” After an hour, they walk to school, with Kathy reminding Eddie, “remember, this day will not be the same after I get done with it.”

When Eddie and Kathy arrive at school, Kathy is wearing her torn clothing from yesterday. Her torn clothing attracts a lot of attention from both students and teachers. Rumors fly around in the morning and, by afternoon, everyone knows exactly what happened yesterday after the meet. Whenever Kathy is asked about her torn clothes, she tells them, “it’s a new style by a designer named Paul Mahoney.”

Eddie, seeing Mahoney in the hall during class change, tells him, “I will kick your ass, you piece of shit. I don’t know when I’m going to do it. Maybe today, maybe next week, or maybe over the Summer. But, I will kick your ass as sure as the sun rose this morning.” Eddie’s open ended threat leaves Mahoney with a high level of uncertainty, and will cause him to walk around in constant fear over the next few months.

The end of the day arrives, and Kathy is ready to put her plan into action. Kathy and Eddie walk to Kathy’s house, where Eddie’s bicycle is waiting for him. Kathy tells Eddie, “Mahoney takes his car to school, and I hear he leaves a little early so he can drive past bus stops and show off his car.” Eddie asks, “where does he live?” Kathy replies, “over on Rugby Road, off of Polo Drive.” Eddie replies, “oh, over in the rich neighborhood.

It figures.” Kathy and Eddie arrive at Kathy’s house. They leave their books, get their bicycles, and ride to the portal.

As they are riding down the driveway, Eddie asks Kathy, “so, when we come back to this morning, will I still have my bicycle here?” Kathy tells him, “yes. It has to be here, because it was here this morning.” Eddie asks, “and we’ll be waiting at your house for ourselves?” Kathy replies, “yeah.” Eddie is impressed that Kathy is so sure of herself. When they arrive at the portal, Kathy raises her right hand, and says, “today, at 6:00 a.m.” Kathy and Eddie are immediately transported back in time to this morning before school started. Eddie asks, “why so early?” Kathy replies, “I don’t want to rush. I want to make sure that I get this right.”

Kathy and Eddie ride past Kathy’s house, and then to the other side of the town where Mahoney lives. It only takes them a few minutes to get across town. They pass Mahoney’s house, and Kathy mentions, “there’s his car.” Mahoney’s car, a current model year blue Corvette, is parked in the driveway. Eddie tells Kathy, “Mahoney was in school today. I saw him.” Kathy replies, “good. All is going according to plan then.” Kathy tells Eddie, “okay. Now we go back to my house and wait.”

When they get to Kathy’s house, they go to the side yard, and sit and wait. After a while, Kathy, who is all excited, points to the driveway, and tells Eddie, “here you come!” Kathy waves to Eddie, who arrived early this morning, as he rides up. She motions for him to come to the side of the house. Kathy exclaims, “awesome! Now I have two of you.” Eddie, who just came through the portal with Kathy, tells her, “wow! It worked just like you said.” Kathy tells the two Eddies, “okay! Now we just have to wait for me to come out of the house.” In a few minutes, Kathy walks out of the house, looking for Eddie. Kathy whispers to her counterpart from behind a bush, “hey! We’re over here.” Kathy and Eddie, with their early morning counterparts, get on their bicycles and ride to Mahoney’s house. They, however, take slightly different routes for obvious reasons.

Once they arrive at Mahoney’s house, they hide their bicycles behind some bushes in a neighbor’s yard. Kathy, who just came through the portal, tells her counterpart, “no changes. Just like I, you, or is it we? Ha ha. Just as planned.” Kathy tells Eddie and his counterpart, “squat down behind Mahoney’s car where he won’t see you.” Kathy instructs Eddie and his counterpart, “if he gets physical, then come and rescue us.” As planned, Kathy and her counterpart walk a little way down the sidewalk in opposite directions, waiting for Mahoney to leave for school.

Fifteen minutes go by, and Mahoney comes out of the front door. Kathy sees him coming down the walk, signaling to her counterpart that he is leaving. They both walk toward each other as planned, arriving in front of Mahoney’s house at the same time. Kathy, wearing her torn

clothing, yells out to Mahoney, "I am Katarina Karakova." Kathy's counterpart is wearing the same torn clothing, but is standing ten feet away in the other direction. Her counterpart also yells out, "I am Katarina Karakova."

Mahoney freezes, and stares, and appears as if he is ready to panic. Kathy and her counterpart yell out in unison, "we are Katarina Karakova." With their arms motionless at their sides, Kathy, and her counterpart, walk very slowly toward Mahoney. Mahoney looks to his left, then to his right, and freezes, then goes into a full-blown panic attack. Kathy and her counterpart again yell out, "we are Katarina Karakova!" Mahoney panics, drops his books and his car keys on the ground, and runs back into his house screaming, "this can't be happening! I must have killed her! Noooooo!"

Kathy gives her counterpart a high-five. Eddie and his counterpart have been watching from behind Mahoney's car as Kathy and Kathy's counterpart both scared the crap out of Mahoney. Once Mahoney is inside, Kathy instructs Eddie and his counterpart, "okay! Back on the bikes! We're out of here." They all leave the scene, and stop around the corner. Kathy tells everyone, "that went perfectly, right according to plan." Kathy then gives her counterpart a hug, telling her, "I might be the first person in the world to hug myself!" They all then ride back to Kathy's house, again taking separate routes.

Once at Kathy's house, Kathy tells her counterpart and Eddie's counterpart from this morning, "well, we're headed back to the portal, but you guys have to go to school." Kathy's counterpart asks, "what happens if we go to the portal, and you guys go to school?" Kathy answers, saying, "you know. I'm going to have to think about that one." Eddie and Kathy head to the portal, as their counterparts walk to school, knowing that, in the altered universe, Mahoney will be absent from school today.

Once they return through the portal and get back from the past, Kathy remarks to Eddie, "oh, good. We're still here." Eddie asks, "how in the world were you able to figure all this out?" Kathy tells Eddie, "I missed a lot of sleep thinking about it last night." Eddie remarks, "that was pure genius, Katarina Karakova." Kathy replies, "thank you. When that asshole knocked me over, I felt like he broke every bone in my chest. I thought I was going to die. He shouldn't be allowed to get away with that." Eddie replies, "he'll probably, at least, get suspended." Kathy replies, "no, he won't. His father's an attorney. He'll get the little twirp out of it somehow." Kathy and Eddie ride back to Kathy's house, both wondering how they may have changed the future.

When they get back to Kathy's house, Eddie tells Kathy, "good news! I don't see any sign of us here." Kathy laughs, telling Eddie, "yeah. If we

did, we'd probably feel like Mahoney did when he saw both of me." Kathy and Eddie go inside for a while and relax. Kathy puts on *The Power of Love*, as they both sit back and listen. Kathy closes her eyes, and begins to fall asleep. She tells Eddie, "I can't believe I'm so tired." Eddie reminds Kathy, "well, you've been through a lot in the last two days." Kathy replies, "yeah, that's right. I'll be a lot better in the morning, and tomorrow's Friday."

Kathy then mentions to Eddie, "do you know what I'm going to say the next time I see Mahoney?" Eddie replies, "no. Tell me." Kathy tells him, "I'm going to say to him, 'we are Katarina Karakova.'" Eddie and Kathy start laughing, and Eddie knows that Kathy is back to normal again. Eddie stays with Kathy for a while, and then he has to head home. Even though it's early, they give each other a goodnight kiss. Both of them desperately need sleep, so it will be an early night for both of them.

The next day at school, shortly after the morning announcements, another announcement comes over the loudspeaker. The expected words are announced, "will Paul Mahoney please report to the principal's office." Kathy whispers to herself, "I can't even imagine what that's all about." Another ten minutes go by, and the same announcement comes over the PA system. Kathy then whispers to Paula, "I guess he didn't make it to school today." If that is the case, it suits Kathy just fine. She'd prefer not to see Mahoney around school anyway. All during the day, gossip flies about the incident after the track meet. Many students speculate what could have happened to Paul Mahoney. A rumor is being spread that he was carted off to jail.

By the end of the day, one fact has emerged to dispel all of the rumors and speculation. Mahoney has been admitted to the hospital. Not just any hospital, mind you. Mahoney has been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. During the hospital admission, he is reported to have been repeatedly screaming, "there's two of her now! She's coming to get me!"

The nervous breakdown after the final track meet, followed by seeing two of Kathy, was far too much for Mahoney to handle. Mahoney's anger and bitterness have been brewing all year. After holding it in for the entire year, he finally snapped. It's a good thing for Mahoney that he is in the hospital. Dr. Karakova will be pressing assault charges. If Mahoney were not in the hospital, he would likely be on his way to jail right now.

With the regular track season now over, Eddie and Kathy walk home together after school. On the way, Eddie asks Kathy, "did you hear about Mahoney?" Kathy replies, "yeah. And I don't care that he's in the hospital. Everyone is a whole lot safer now, especially me." Kathy also informs Eddie, "my dad is going to press charges against that jerk." Eddie reassures Kathy, "he's gone after this year anyway." Kathy sighs, and

replies, “you’re right. After this year, he’s gone for good.” Eddie asks, “so, is there anything you want to do? We have all this time.” Kathy tells Eddie, “when I get home, I want to listen to my song, then we can go ride somewhere. I want to ride somewhere that’s quiet.” Eddie replies, “yeah, I can see that.”

Kathy listens to her song, and then they head to Eddie’s house. Kathy tells Eddie, “I’ll ride my bicycle, and you can run next to me.” Eddie suggests, “I could just carry you and your bicycle. After all, I haven’t worked out much today.” They both laugh, and decide that they would walk Kathy’s bicycle to his house. Eddie needs a few days of rest from running anyway. Next week, it will be back to training again in preparation for the State invitational track meet. When they arrive at Eddie’s house, Eddie suggests a park that is not too far away. In fact, only a few people know that the park is even there.

When they arrive at the park, it is completely deserted. They have the whole park to themselves, which suits Kathy just fine. Riding over to the swings, they swing for a few minutes. Eyeing a park bench in the shade, Kathy suggests they go over to that area of the park and sit for a while. They sit on the park bench for barely a minute, then Kathy lands on Eddie’s lap. Kathy and Eddie affectionately embrace each other, holding each other tightly. Kathy gets a little wild, and kisses Eddie like she never has before. They get off the bench, and lay on the grass continuing to embrace each other. As time goes by, it stands still for Kathy and Eddie, who are again in a world of their own.

After a while, Kathy lays with her head on Eddie’s chest, as they fall deeper in love with each other. Kathy whispers to Eddie, “I think I might have a wild side.” Eddie replies, “I suspected that. The Hula Hoop gave it away.” Kathy replies, “my Hula Hoop? Really? How is that?” Eddie whispers, “no one can Hula Hoop like you do and not be a little on the wild side.” Kathy sighs, and whispers, “yeah. Maybe you’re right.”

They lay on the grass for a while, but the time to go home arrives too soon. Kathy tells Eddie, “my parents are going out for dinner tonight. I guess we need to get going.” Eddie replies, “yeah, it’s Friday. So, my family is going out too.” Kathy comes up with a wonderful idea, and tells Eddie, “hey! Maybe our families can all go out together!” Eddie exclaims, “that would be awesome!” They get on their bicycles and ride to Eddie’s house to see if they can make the arrangements.

When they get to Eddie’s house, Eddie and Kathy ask his parents if they want to go out to dinner with Kathy’s family. Eddie’s father tells Kathy, “sure. We’d love to go out to dinner with you and your parents.” Kathy calls her parents, who tell her they would like to join Eddie’s parents for dinner.

Eddie's and Kathy's parents have briefly met once before at the State invitational meet but, since Kathy's father had to fulfil his officiating duties, they did not get much of a chance to talk. Since Kathy and her bicycle are at Eddie's house, she decides she'll ride with Eddie's family to the restaurant.

Everyone decides on Italian food, since Eddie and Kathy have taken a liking to pizza recently. When they meet at the restaurant, Eddie and Kathy reintroduce their parents to each other. The parents order typical Italian dishes, whereas Eddie and Kathy split a pizza.

Interestingly, Eddie's mother tells him, "Eddie, you shouldn't eat so much pizza. You're going to get fat." Eddie replies, "since I've been going out for pizza with Kathy, my times have gotten better, and I can lift more weight." Eddie's father mentions, "you can lift more weight and run faster because of Kathy, not the pizza." Everyone laughs, starting the evening out with everyone displaying a good sense of humor.

After dinner, Eddie's and Kathy's parents agree that they must do this more often. Eddie and Kathy were certainly glad to hear of those plans. They love the time they have together, so more time is a good thing.

On the way out of the restaurant, Kathy, mentioning to her parents, says, "my bicycle is still at Eddie's house. Can I ride back with him?" Eddie's younger brother, John, mentions, "you just left it there so you have to come back to get it." Young kids do that sort of thing, so they figure the older kids do it as well. Eddie tells Kathy, "it looks like he just busted you." Kathy replies, "yup! Guilty as charged." Kathy gets to ride home with Eddie and his family. Eddie's brother sees that Kathy's well-thought out plan to purposely leave her bicycle at their house worked. Everyone has another good laugh, as they head out to their cars.

The next week goes rather well for everyone, except for Mahoney, who has not been to school all week. The State invitational meet is coming up in a week, so those who are invited practice after school. Most of the practice sessions involve the relay team members perfecting their handoff skills. Mr. Frazier gives the team Thursday and Friday off, so that they will be fully recovered for the meet on Saturday. Mr. Frazier did instruct the team, however, to not eat pizza on Friday night. Somehow the word got around that some team members frequent a certain pizzeria after practice. Pizza now seems to be the official food of the track team.

The morning of the Spring track State invitational meet arrives, and the bus leaves early, at 6:30 a.m. The track meet will take the entire day. For Eddie, the 100-yard dash is one of the first events of the meet, and the 4 by 440 relay is the last event of the day. There will be a lot of time between the two events, hopefully giving Eddie and Kathy, Mark and

Paula, and Johnson and Barbara some time to be together. It's a sure bet, however, that they won't be going out for pizza at lunch.

The bus arrives at the State University, which happens to be the school where Kathy's father is a professor. Dr. Karakova is today's Meet Director. He will be finding some time during the meet to watch Eddie run, per strict instructions from Kathy.

As they are exiting the bus, Kathy tells Eddie, "now you get to see my dad's track. It's pretty awesome." Eddie asks, "what's awesome about it?" Kathy replies, "well, for one, there's a sand track, so it's like running on the beach." Eddie replies, "I'm not falling for that one, Katarina Karakova!" Kathy replies, "no, really! Your 100-yard dash time will be about 25 seconds on the sand track." Eddie tells her, "you're up to something. I can tell." She replies, "no, I'm not, really! There really is a sand track. You'll see."

When they get to the track, the entire team is impressed. The outdoor venue appears suitable to host an Olympic type event. Mr. Frazier takes the team to their designated area. Kathy asks Mr. Frazier, "can I go show Eddie something? It will only take a few minutes." Mr. Frazier curiously asks, "show him what?" Kathy replies, "the new sand track. It's on the other side of the main track, across from the bleachers." Mr. Frazier replies, "sure. I'm coming too. I want to see it," then tells the rest of the team to unpack their equipment.

Mr. Frazier and Eddie follow Kathy to an area adjacent to the main track, clear across from the stands. When they come up to the 220-yard sand track, Kathy says to Eddie, "see! A sand track!" Eddie knew Kathy had something up her sleeve. Kathy adds, "they put it in last year." Eddie asks, "what's it for?" Mr. Frazier answers, telling Eddie, "when you run in sand, especially barefoot, you force certain muscles to work harder, giving much better leg muscle development." Eddie mentions, "I run on the beach a lot over the Summer." Mr. Frazier replies, "I remember you mentioned that once over the Winter season." Mr. Frazier now has the idea that he should look into obtaining a sand track for the high school. As they head back to the team, Kathy bumps Eddie's hip with hers, telling him, "see! There really is a sand track."

While the team settles in, the first half hour is filled with registration and paperwork for the coaches. Mr. Frazier and Barbara take care of the administrative work. The 100-yard dash is scheduled to begin early, so Eddie is stretching and doing some light warmups. Braden is looking up at the bleachers, trying to find Wendy. Johnson is not fully awake yet, but he doesn't need to be since his events aren't until later. Mark is sitting back, with his legs crossed and his hands behind his head. Mark is no doubt thinking of new ways to distract runners before the race. It is

obvious by the look in Mark's eyes that he has thought of a few really good ones.

After the hurdles are out of the way, the Meet Announcer tells the runners in the 100-yard dash to proceed to the starting line. Once they are all present, the Starter tells the runners, "you must run your best race. Only the top six times go to the final." Eddie is in the second heat, Mark in the first. Over at the finish line, Eddie sees Dr. Karakova, the Meet Director, where Kathy told Eddie he would be. The runners in the first heat are instructed to get ready. Mark looks over the field, recognizing most of the runners as someone he's beaten before. One of them is John Brady, who Mark worked over during indoor track, and then again in the Spring track season.

The Starter announces, "on your marks." Mark looks over at Brady, and says nothing. This is enough to shake up Brady, who seems to fall for every trick in the book. The Starter then announces, "set." The gun is fired, and six of the fastest high school runners in the State are off.

At 50 yards, it is a two-man race between Mark and Brady. Brady, who is slightly ahead, is not about to be beaten by Mark again. Brady is forcing Mark to run his best. At 75 yards into the race, Mark and Brady maintain their position, both running at about the same speed. At the finish line, Brady crosses first. Mark, who is very close behind, comes in second place. Finishing far behind Mark, it appears none of the other runners in this heat will make the final. Brady is now aware that Mark is a formidable competitor. If Brady makes the final, you can be sure he will run a faster race.

Eddie is up next. He knows Kathy and her father are at the finish line, so he wants to run a good time. The presence of Kathy's father at the finish line somehow causes Eddie to think back to the day Mahoney hit Kathy. This gives Eddie an additional adrenaline surge.

The Starter tells them to get ready. The Starter announces, "on your marks," followed in a few seconds by, "set." As the gun is fired, Eddie is out of the blocks, already two steps ahead of the rest of the field by 10 yards. At 50 yards, it is a one man race, Eddie versus the clock. Eddie crosses the finish line first, with no one remotely close to him. Kathy's father mentions to Kathy, "that was a very impressive run." Kathy's dad goes over to the Timekeeper to find out Eddie's time. Kathy asks her father, "what did Eddie run?" He whispers to Kathy, "unofficially a 9.6. He'll be in the final. But, don't tell anyone until the official announcement. So will Mark, by the way."

After Eddie and Kathy talk for a while, Kathy has to go back to work, and Eddie returns to the team area. He sees Mark talking with Paula.

Paula and Mark are pointing to various areas of the track, and seem to be discussing something interesting. Paula then breaks into a few sexy poses, with Mark nodding his head yes or no. This spurs Eddie's interest, so he walks over and asks, "okay, what are you guys up to?" Paula smiles, and replies, "nothing at all. But, we definitely need your help." Eddie remarks, "okay. This is going to be good, whatever it is."

Mark elaborates on his plan, and begins by telling Eddie, "Damien Harrington, the guy who took the gold in the 40 during indoor track is here, and Brady just edged me out." Eddie replies, "and?" Mark explains his plan, telling Eddie, "during the 100-yard dash final, Paula is going to stand at the midway point of the track, looking really sexy. I'm going to tell Brady that Paula has had her eyes on him during the whole meet, and that she must like him. Then I'll point her out before the final and mention to him if he doesn't believe me, look at her while he's running." Eddie replies, "that's a good plan, bro! He'll lose a few steps and fall behind."

Eddie then asks, "so, what do you need me to do?" Mark tells Eddie, "I need you to tell Harrington that Paula has her eyes on him." Eddie replies, "you got it, bro." Mark points out to Eddie, "we're all going to be standing around for at least five or ten minutes before the final begins, so that would be a perfect time to do it." Eddie agrees, and the plan is set.

After the 100-yard dash preliminary heats are completed, the Meet Clerk compiles and examines the times. The times and lane assignments for the final are posted shortly afterwards. As he is talking with the mile medley relay team, Mr. Frazier instructs Kathy to go and find out who is in the 100-yard dash final. Kathy procures the requested information, and brings it to Mr. Frazier, who looks at the paper showing the finalists and lane assignments. Mr. Frazier is exuberant because Eddie and Mark are both in the final. Mr. Frazier tells Kathy to round up Mark, Eddie, Paula, and Barbara for a brief team meeting.

Giving both Eddie and Mark a high-five, Mr. Frazier tells them, "congratulations! You're both in the final!" Mr. Frazier then gives them the scoop, explaining, "Eddie, you're the number two seed and you will be in lane four. Mark, you're the number four seed and you will be in lane number two." Mark asks, "who else is in?" Mr. Frazier replies, "the number one seed is Harrington, who is in lane three. And there's Brady, who is in lane five. The other two runners should be non-contenders."

Mr. Frazier then tells Barbara, "Barbara, I want you at the finish line with me." He continues, telling Kathy, "I want you in mid field, getting a photo of the runners." Mr. Frazier, coming to Paula, tells her, "and Paula, I want you at the start, and get a photo of the runners out of the blocks."

Mark then asks, “can Paula and Kathy switch positions?” Mr. Frazier asks, “why?” Mark replies, “I have a plan.” Mr. Frazier asks, “a plan?” Mark tells Mr. Frazier, “yeah. But, we need to have Paula at mid track.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, “I don’t know what you guys are up to. But, okay. Paula will be at mid track. Fill me in about this plan after the meet.” Mr. Frazier knows they are up to something big. He also knows that whatever plans they have conjured up are to gain an advantage, so he allows the change. Paula whispers to Mark, “this is going to work a whole lot better than you think.”

The Meet Announcer makes the call for the 100-yard dash final. Paula quickly gets into position near mid track. The finalists congregate around the starting line. Mark whispers to Eddie that Paula is almost in position, and will be about twenty yards away until race time approaches. She will then move into her mid track position after Brady and Harrington get a good look at her sexy body language. Mark asks Eddie, “are you ready to go into action?” Eddie replies, “yeah. Let’s go for it.” Pointing out Harrington to Eddie, Mark tells him, “there’s your target.” Mark then mentions, “and, here comes mine,” as Brady walks up.

Changing his tone from the meet earlier in the season, Mark approaches Brady, telling him, “good luck.” Brady returns the favor, wishing Mark good luck too. Mark, pointing out Paula to Brady, asks, “hey, is that your girlfriend over there?” Paula watches Brady, waiting for them to make eye contact. When Brady catches Paula’s eye, a sexy smile comes across her face as she waves. Brady, who now seems to be Mark’s best buddy for pointing this out, asks Mark, “no. Who is she?” Mark, seeing Brady’s reaction, points out to him, “I don’t know. She was watching you during the preliminaries.” Showing some interest, Brady replies, “really?” Mark then explains, “I thought she was looking at me, but then I realized it was you. She was standing a little farther down during our first race.” Setting Brady up for the fall, Mark tells him, “take a look. She’ll have her eyes glued to you during the whole race.” Brady, who is now distracted, looks down the track at Paula a few times as he is getting ready.

Meanwhile, Eddie approaches Harrington, telling him, “hey. Congratulations on winning the 40 at the State meet this Winter.” Harrington replies, “oh, thanks.” Eddie, pointing to Paula, asks Harrington, “is that your prize over there too?” Harrington, somewhat confused, asks, “what prize?” Eddie replies, “the girl. I thought she was with you. She’s been checking you out big time. I thought she was your girlfriend.” Harrington looks down the track at Paula, who smiles immediately when they make eye contact. After seeing Paula smiling at Harrington, Eddie mentions to him, “see?” Eddie then reveals, “someone said she was watching you during the preliminaries. They thought you two were together.” Harrington mentions, “I wonder who she is.” Eddie

suggests, “glance over at her during the race. I bet she’ll be staring right at you.” Harrington, who keeps glancing down the track at Paula, is also now hopelessly distracted.

The Starter tells the finalists to get ready. Harrington and Brady both look down the track at Paula. Paula, swinging her hips as she walks backwards to mid track, looks in their direction and waves. This clears up any doubt in Brady’s and Harrington’s mind about what they just learned.

The Starter tells the finalists, “on your marks.” Brady, who is taking a while to get ready, keeps looking down the track at Paula. Harrington’s hormones have kicked in instead of his adrenaline, causing him to become more relaxed, and not physically ready for the race. The Starter announces, “set.” The gun goes off and the runners are out of the blocks.

At ten yards into the race, it’s a close race that anyone can still win. Harrington quickly develops a short lead, with Eddie right behind him. Mark appears to be tied with Brady, but it’s too close to call who is ahead. At 40 yards into the race, Brady briefly turns his head to the right to look at Paula. While he turns and looks, his stride veers slightly to the right, and he must quickly correct his bearing and cadence. This is enough to cause him to briefly drop down to fifth place, eventually regaining his position in fourth place. Mark, now in third place, has his hope set on a medal.

Harrington, on the other hand, waits until just before mid track to glance at Paula. Harrington turns his head abruptly to the right for a split second to see if Paula is looking him over. When Harrington turns his head, he briefly steps out of his lane. He quickly regains his stride, never getting a good look at Paula. After Harrington’s mishap, Eddie is now in first place.

Any sprinter knows, or should know, that you should never turn your head while you are running. Turning your head while sprinting will have a tendency to cause you to run in the direction your head is turned, potentially causing you to leave your lane. In addition, intentionally turning your head to one direction will disrupt your stride and cadence. Distance runners do not have this problem. Generally, in distance races, tenths of a second do not matter.

At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, taking the gold medal. Harrington follows right behind him, taking second place. Mark finishes right behind Harrington. Brady takes fourth place, completely unaware that Mark has thrown him under the bus once again. The other two runners have a better than expected finish, following Brady by only a tenth of a second or two.

After the race, one of the Lane Judges is seen walking down the track. The Lane Judge makes the Head Timekeeper aware that the runner in lane three stepped out of his lane. The Head Timekeeper asks the Timekeeper assigned to lane three if he saw it. Confirming the findings of the Lane Judge, the Timekeeper assigned to lane three added that he thought the runner almost tripped for a moment. Stepping out of your lane results in an immediate disqualification. With two officials seeing the infraction, Harrington has no leg to stand on.

Meanwhile, Mark, unaware of Harrington's disqualification, is happy that he got third place. Eddie and Mark exchange high-fives while the runners stand around waiting for the announcement. Eddie remarks, "the plan worked." Mark replies, "yeah, it took me a while this morning to come up with that one." If Mark was unable to distract one of the runners, Mark would have probably taken fourth place. Fourth place is no better than a participation trophy, worth absolutely nothing. But, why distract only one runner if you can distract two.

Due to the disqualification, the announcement is delayed for a short time. With the times finally verified, the Meet Announcer declares the winners. The long awaited announcement arrives, as the Meet Announcer declares, "in first place, running for Northside High, Edward Bogenskaya. In second place, also running for Northside High, Mark Svoboda. In third place, running for Riverdale, John Brady." The announcer tells the winners, "congratulations to all of you, and we will see you at the awards ceremony this evening."

After the announcement, Mark, who is all excited, asks Barbara, "what happened? How did I get second place?" Barbara tells Mark, "the guy in lane three stepped out of his lane and was disqualified." Mark grins, and replies, "wow! Awesome!" Mr. Frazier, Mark, Eddie, and the three girls then head back to the team area, celebrating the victory on their way. Kathy is again on Eddie's shoulders, and Paula on Mark's. Both Brady and Harrington see Paula on Mark's shoulders. They both think, correctly for that matter, that Mark and Eddie had pulled something over on them. Brady and Harrington, who are both seniors, will not return next year.

When they return to the bench, Mr. Frazier asks Paula, "okay. What was all that about switching positions?" Paula replies, "well, it was Mark's idea." Mr. Frazier questions Mark, "what exactly were you guys up to?" Mark replies, "Eddie was in on it too. It wouldn't have worked without him." Mr. Frazier then asks, "will somebody please tell me what you guys were doing out there?" Mark then explains to Mr. Frazier in detail about his plan, and how they conspired together. Mr. Frazier starts laughing, and asks Mark, "how did you come up with this?" Mark replies, "I needed a new way to mess with their heads. So, I put it together before the meet started." Paula reminds Mr. Frazier, "well, you always said it's our job to

flirt with the opponents if necessary.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, “I did say that, didn’t I? Guilty as charged!” Mr. Frazier tells Mark and Eddie, “you guys never cease to amaze me.”

Kathy, who is crying with tears of joy, tells Eddie, “you did it! You got first place!” Eddie replies, “yeah! And, just think, at the beginning of the year I was wondering if I would even make the team.” While they are talking, Kathy’s father walks up to personally congratulate Eddie. He tells Eddie, “that was a very fine run! Congratulations!” Eddie replies, “thank you. Thank you.” Dr. Karakova informs Eddie, “by the way, you’re a freshman, and you’re running college times.” Eddie asks, “what did I run?” The Meet Director tells Eddie, “a 9.5, but it’s a rubber track so the times are usually a little faster than on the gravel track at your high school.” Eddie looks at Kathy, telling her, “see what happens to my times when I carry you all around town?” Kathy replies, asking, “how do you know it wasn’t all that pizza?” They all have a good laugh, but then the Meet Director has to excuse himself to resume his officiating duties.

Eddie, Mark, and the rest of the team sit back and relax for a while. Getting a short break, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara join them. The next race will be the mile medley relay, which will be right before lunch. Braden asks Kathy, “what ever happened to Mahoney?” Kathy, quick to answer, tells Braden, “he’s still in the hospital, and I heard he’s not getting out anytime soon.” Kathy then reveals, “my father was going to press charges against him, but then he decided not to since Mahoney is in the loony bin. The attorney basically told us that Mahoney’s jail time is being served in the hospital.”

Braden comments, “yeah, if that son of a bitch goes to a real jail, they’re gonna rip him a new hole where he never had one before.” Barbara asks, “what?” Braden explains, “if you go to jail for assaulting a girl, you’re in for a real ass kicking that’s never gonna end until you get out.” Kathy remarks, “yeah, well it’s a good thing for him that he’s in the loony bin.” Braden also mentions, “if he goes to jail, they’ll do some other shit to him too. But, I ain’t saying what that is.” Eddie looks at Kathy, telling her, “well, the hospital sounds like a lot better alternative to jail.” Kathy whispers back to Eddie, “I’m glad we helped Mahoney out then.”

After a while, the call is heard for the mile medley relay. Zaino, Bell, Johnson, and Mitchell all get up and go to their race. Mr. Frazier tells Kathy to stay behind and find some lunch for the team. After Mr. Frazier is gone, Eddie tells Kathy, “you heard him! You’re in charge of lunch. Break out the pizza!” Kathy sighs, and replies, “that’s tomorrow.” Kathy then tells everyone, “there’s a cafeteria on campus. They’re supposed to have some good food, and pizza. It’s better than fast food.” Everyone agrees to give it a try after the mile medley relay is over.

The mile medley team returns from their event, taking second place. This is a good accomplishment, considering the strong field of runners this year. The mile medley team almost ended up in fourth place, but Mitchell, who ran the 880-yard leg, ran a smart race, and pulled off the win right at the end. Johnson will have to run again later in the 4 by 440 relay, and will be looking forward to winning another medal.

The team then heads to the cafeteria for lunch, where they will hang out as a group until later this afternoon. Mr. Frazier does not want the 4 by 440 relay team out in the heat all afternoon before the race. By having the relay team sit in the air conditioned building until their event, the runners will be able to deliver a better performance.

About a half hour before the 4 by 440 relay, the relay team heads back out to the track. With the relay team now back in the team area, Mr. Frazier goes to check which heat the team will run in. Eddie remarks, "I'm glad we were in the air conditioning. It's getting hot out here now." Mark mentions to Eddie, "I wonder if we'll be up against Brady or Harrington again." Eddie replies, "they'll be ticked off." Mark, changing the topic, asks, "someday, this Summer, can you tell me how you got so fast so quick?" Eddie tells Mark, "sure. No problem. It's really easy."

Mr. Frazier returns with the good news. The news is that the team will be up against Henderson, Riverdale, and Centerville in the same heat. Mr. Frazier also informs them that they are in the first heat. Braden asks, "Centerville? What was the deal with them?" Eddie answers for Mr. Frazier, "McCrutchen, McClutching, or whatever his name is."

Mr. Frazier tells the team, "it looks like the first heat will take all the medals from what I can see." The higher seeded teams have been clustered together, ensuring they run their best race. Mr. Frazier then reminds his team, "you have beaten all these teams' times in the past, but don't let your guard down. They have a score to settle." Mark replies, "yeah. More than one score." Mr. Frazier knows exactly what Mark is referring to, since the gold medal that Harrington had his eyes set on will be draped around Eddie's neck shortly. Mr. Frazier tells Mark, "see if you can think of something else to distract them since you have a few minutes."

The Meet Announcer issues the call for the 4 by 440 relay teams to meet at the starting line. The team heads over, and Mr. Frazier notices Mark is noticeably limping. Mr. Frazier suddenly gets concerned, and asks Mark, "is there something wrong with your leg?" Mark replies, "no. I'm just faking it so they think I'm injured." Mr. Frazier quickly sees Mark's plan. If they think Mark is injured, they may not think that his team will be much competition, and therefore not run their best.

Mr. Frazier then decides to change the lineup, telling Mark, “okay, I want you to be the anchor.” Having an injured runner as the anchorman may also give somewhat of an advantage, leaving the uncertainty alive as long as possible. Mark continues to limp to the starting line, as Mr. Frazier informs the other team members of Mark’s plan. Mr. Frazier tells Mark, “limp around, and make sure everybody sees you.” Mr. Frazier also instructs Braden that he will be the lead off man, and to be quiet at the beginning of the race. Braden, being quiet, will certainly be a feat in itself.

At the starting line, Harrington sees Mark limping. Harrington will be Henderson’s anchorman. Brady, the anchorman for Riverdale, looks over at Mark, watching him as he limps. Both Harrington and Brady now feel like they will be on vacation during this race. Mark remains quiet, having nothing to say to any of his opponents. Many of the runners are now all too familiar with Mark’s psychological warfare, and they are glad to see him keeping to himself for once. Barbara hands Braden the baton, and Braden enters the track.

The Starter makes sure the runners are all in position and ready to run. Once he is satisfied, the Starter gives the command, “on your marks,” then, shortly after, announcing, “set.” The gun fires, and the first heat of the last event is underway. Braden takes an early lead, but not a whole lot of people notice. Most of the attention has been drawn to Mark, who is sitting on the ground as Paula works on his leg. Brady, a short distance away, can be heard laughing, telling a teammate, “this race will be cake.”

After Paula works on his leg, Mark gets up and walks around. Braden has already handed the baton off to Johnson, but many people have missed noticing that Braden was clearly in first place during the transition. Mr. Frazier is watching all of this as it transpires, wondering how Mark comes up with these ideas. Johnson, in the meantime, is making good time and maintaining the lead. None of the competing teams are concerned about Johnson’s lead because they figure Mark will quickly lose any lead Northside has managed to gain.

Eddie is on the track waiting for Johnson. Another runner, who is also on the track waiting for a handoff, tells Eddie, “it’s not going to matter this time, dude. You guys are out of it.” Eddie replies, “yeah. Well, you still got to try.” Johnson, who has maintained first place, hands off to Eddie. After Eddie receives his baton, Henderson, Riverdale, and Centerville all handoff in rapid succession.

With Mark apparently injured, the three other teams think they will be vying for first, second, and third place during the final leg. Paula asks Mark, loud enough for the other competitors and coaches to hear, “do you think you can do this?” Mark replies, “I think I can finish.” Mark gets on

the track, waiting for Eddie. Eddie has widened the lead by a significant margin, but the opponents do not seem to care.

Eddie hands off the baton to Mark, who takes off like a jet plane. Harrington, waiting in the transition zone, watches Mark as he runs away with a perfect stride, wondering what in the world just happened. To Harrington, Mark appeared to be injured. Harrington, who is so focused on Mark's remarkable recovery, leaves the transition zone late, bungling the handoff. This ultimately causes Harrington to lose far more time than he can make up.

Brady watches Harrington's bad handoff instead of focusing on his own. Brady's handoff is so poorly done, that the baton is transferred with both runners nearly stationary. McCutchen, from the arch rival Centerville, watches the commotion as it develops. McCutchen leaves too late, causing a bad handoff that resulted in him dropping the baton, losing at least ten precious seconds. Fortunately, for McCutchen, the baton does not leave his lane, otherwise his team would be disqualified. Meanwhile, Mark is clearly in the lead, leaving a train wreck behind him. Mr. Frazier cannot believe what he is seeing. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara are all laughing so hard at what just happened in the transition zone.

Mark sprints around the curve, headed toward the finish line without any competition in sight. Totally unaware of the carnage he left behind, Mark wonders where the other runners are. Mark crosses the finish line, with no one remotely behind him. He steps off the track, and exchanges high-fives with his other team members.

Mr. Frazier and Paula fill Mark in on what transpired after he began his leg. Mark is quite surprised that his plan worked a lot better than expected. This was supposed to be the heat that produced the medalists. Instead, the handoff zone turned into a three-ring circus.

The team returns to their area as the other heats continue. On the way, the team celebrates, but they will have to wait a while to see where they placed. Kathy is again on Eddie's shoulders. Paula is on Mark's shoulders, giving credence to the fact there was never really anything wrong with Mark's leg. The other teams also return to their area, watching painfully as Mark carries Paula. Harrington's and Brady's teams, who were expected to medal in this event, will likely go home empty handed. If they had only focused on their own task and not paid attention to Mark and Eddie's distractions, they may have placed better in the 100-yard dash and the 4 by 440 relay.

After the final heat, the coaches surround the Meet Clerk. The times are checked, rechecked, and verified by several officials. The announcement comes, with the Meet Announcer declaring to the coaches,

“first place goes to Northside High.” Mr. Frazier yells out, “yes!” He does not even wait to see who was in second and third place but, instead, he runs back to the team to deliver the good news.

After Mr. Frazier leaves, one of the coaches remarks to another, “Frazier’s team is going to be a problem in the next few years. Those guys are all freshmen.” The other coach replies, “wow! So, we’re going to see three more years of this.” Or worse, because the team is likely to be better in the upcoming years.

Mr. Frazier returns to the team and delivers the good news, “you guys took first place!” Celebration breaks out, with cheering that could be heard on the other side of the track. High-fives follow, followed by a celebration kiss between a few of the couples. Mr. Frazier tells the team, “the medals ceremony is in 30 minutes. If you guys want to get a quick bite to eat, now is the time.” Kathy and Paula look at each other and yell out, “pizza!” The whole team, including Mr. Frazier, wastes no time and heads to the cafeteria. They all decide to get pizza, including Mr. Frazier.

After dinner, the team rushes to the closing ceremony, which is held on the track. They get there with no time to spare. The Meet Announcer opens the ceremony, introducing today’s meet officials. He congratulates all the coaches and teams for their stellar performances. He then instructs the medalists to come down from the bleachers and meet at the shot-put pad. Once there, they will be lined up by another official in the order in which they will receive their award.

Following the awards for the hurdles, the program moves on to the 100-yard dash. The Meet Announcer states, “first place in the 100-yard dash, running for Northside High, goes to Edward Bogenskaya.” As Eddie walks up and stands on the first place tier, the crowd cheers. The Meet Announcer continues, “in second place, also running for Northside High, Mark Svoboda.” Throughout the stadium, cheering continues, especially from the Northside bench where a few distinct female voices can be heard. The Meet Announcer announces, “in third place, running for Riverdale High, John Brady.” Once the medalists are on their tiers, the meet officials drape the medals around the winners’ necks. The cheering continues as some photos are taken. The ceremony then moves on to the next event. Mark and Eddie return to the shot-put area, waiting for their next award.

Johnson, Mitchell, Zaino, and Bell placed in the mile medley relay event, and are called to take their place on the second place tier. Zaino and Bell are secretly happy that Johnson and Mitchell were reassigned to the mile medley team. If Mahoney retained his assignment to the mile medley relay team, he would have insisted that Ambrosini be on the team as well, and Zaino and Bell would not have received their medal today.

Zaino and Bell are juniors, and will return next year. Being beaten by a team with all seniors, the mile medley relay team has their eyes on a gold medal next year.

The last award to be distributed is for the 4 by 440 relay. The Meet Announcer begins by introducing the winner, "in first place, in the 4 by 440 relay, running for Northside High, Mark Svoboda, Eric Johnson, Edward Bogenskaya, and Axel Braden." The team comes up and takes their place on the first place tier. The Meet Announcer announces the teams taking second and third place, which go to Northport and Washington respectively. This is a great surprise to everyone, except for those who were present at the great handoff debacle during the first heat. The teams receive their awards and, after the photos, return to their team bench. Kathy runs up to Eddie and greets him with a big hug and a kiss.

After the field athletes receive their awards, the ceremony is over. The parents, family members, and friends come down from the bleachers, and join the team. Eddie's parents congratulate him and the other team members. College scouts make an attempt to talk to Eddie about furthering his education. With his team and team's family members all celebrating together, they are not able to get to Eddie. Eddie drapes his 4 by 440 relay medal around Kathy's neck, which she will wear every day until school is over. The team heads to the bus, as this year's Spring track season comes to a close.

As Eddie and Kathy walk into school Monday, almost everyone notices Eddie's medal draped around Kathy's neck. Mark and Paula arrive at school, also with medals around their necks. As the lobby fills with students, they meet up with Braden, Johnson, and Mitchell. Bobby B. joins them, offering his congratulations. After the seniors graduate and are gone, next year Bobby B. will have a good shot at the State invitational meet. Throughout the day, they all receive congratulations from teachers and students for their achievements.

The group has a good time celebrating their victory again in the lobby. Braden, wearing his medal from the indoor track State invitational meet in addition to his newly earned Spring season medal, tells everyone, "I had my Winter track medal engraved on the back." Eddie says to Braden, "uh oh. I can only imagine." Mark mentions, "I can't wait to see this." Braden shows everyone the back of his gold medal in the 4 by 440 relay that he earned during the indoor season, which is now engraved to read, "Axel Braden, Chief Ass Kicker." Eddie, who sees the inscription first, starts cracking up. Mark, also after seeing the medal, starts laughing. Braden shows everyone around, and in no time it seems like a party breaks out.

The last week of school is the week for final exams, so there will be tests followed by more tests. With one more week to go, Summer

vacation is on the horizon. The students are counting down the days. Unknowing to the students, the teachers are also counting down the days. Truth be told, the teachers began counting down the days long before the students did. This will be a long week for everyone. But, once it's over, a few weeks of freedom begins.

Seated outside the principal's office near the end of the school year, Mr. Frazier awaits his annual performance review. This past year has been a very good one for Mr. Frazier. The track team had an undefeated season and, in several track meets, the team took first, second, and third place in all the events. Mr. Frazier is one of the most-liked teachers in the school. And, in physical education class, Mr. Frazier not only prepares the students physically for sports, but mentally as well.

Mr. Maurice Crum, the principal, calls Mr. Frazier into his office fifteen minutes past his appointment time, and tells Mr. Frazier, "have a seat." Mr. Frazier could have easily figured that out himself, as he was not expecting to stand during his performance review. Taking a seat, Mr. Frazier watches as Mr. Crum fumbles through a few papers, making himself appear more important than he really is.

Mr. Crum opens the meeting, asking Mr. Frazier, "so, tell me. How do you think you've done over this past year?" Reviewing his accomplishments, Mr. Frazier reports, "really well, if you ask me. The track team had an undefeated season. In a few regular season meets, the team swept every event. We've dominated both State invitational meets this year, walking away with a good number of medals. And, next season, the track team is looking even better." Mr. Crum stares out into space, already knowing what Mr. Frazier is espousing. Under Mr. Frazier's coaching, the track team was unstoppable this past year.

Moving on to his accomplishments in academics, Mr. Frazier continues, "in physical education class, I believe I've instilled in the students the motivation to follow their passion and to attack every challenge they'll face in their life with no fear. And, that would be not only in sports, but in academics and employment as well. I've also motivated several students who were not on a sports team to take an interest in certain sports that I've noticed they excel at. One, in particular, was a sophomore, Raymond McDowell, who is now on the wrestling team, and had an awesome season. Another was Luis Pena, who is one of the best soccer players in our school. He thought he'd never make the soccer team because all the other soccer players were a lot bigger and stronger than he was. I encouraged him to try out anyway, and now he's one of our star players. And, there are a few other examples, too." Not sounding too impressed with Mr. Frazier's self assessment, Mr. Crum interrupts, telling Mr. Frazier, "yeah, yeah. We'll get to that in a minute."

Mr. Crum hands Mr. Frazier a copy of his official performance review. Mr. Frazier reviews the appraisal of his performance, and his heart sinks in his chest. Following an uncomfortable moment of silence, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Crum, "I don't understand this. How does my overall review fall into the category 'far below expectations'? I thought I had a great year." Mr. Crum explains, "that was your own assessment of your performance. I don't necessarily agree with your assessment."

As Mr. Crum is speaking, the words Mr. Frazier hears sound like they have traveled through a long tunnel, and go in one ear and out the other. Mr. Frazier further reviews his performance assessment, becoming more depressed when he discovers the primary reason why he was downrated.

Mr. Frazier interrupts Mr. Crum's diatribe, asking, "what's this comment about gross deviations from the State's physical education curriculum?" Mr. Crum replies, "exactly that. You have not been following the published curriculum closely enough. For that, I had to rate you as 'far below expectations'." Mr. Frazier exclaims, "what? I was one of the three contributors who wrote the State's physical education curriculum! I know every word, sentence, and paragraph in that curriculum!" Mr. Crum bluntly replies, "well, maybe you should take some time this Summer and review the curriculum you claim to have written."

Wanting an explanation, Mr. Frazier asks, "what part of the curriculum have I not been following?" Mr. Crum answers, "all of it, especially when it comes to track and field. Track and field is not supposed to be half the syllabus. Every time I look outside, you have the students running around the track." Mr. Frazier firmly replies, "I beg to differ. I do not, and I repeat, do not always have students running around the track." Not immediately addressing Mr. Frazier's concerns, Mr. Crum continues, "and, for the record, the performance of the track team has nothing to do with your performance review. You get paid a stipend to coach track. And, that's it."

Reviewing his notes and laying out some evidence, Mr. Crum boldly informs Mr. Frazier, "mid September, during gym class, Edward Bogenskaya, Mark Svoboda, and Axel Braden were racing on the track while the rest of the class was playing football. You had your attention focused on the three track athletes, completely ignoring the rest of the class." Mr. Crum then drops the bomb, "I have at least a dozen more examples. Would you like to hear them?" Realizing that he will get absolutely nowhere with Mr. Crum, Mr. Frazier replies, "no. That won't be necessary."

Not wanting to stay around for the rest of his review, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Crum, "are we done here?" Mr. Crum replies, "no. I'm just getting started." Listening as Mr. Crum derates his performance, the track coach

sits back, waiting for the principal to finish what sounds more like a tirade than a professional meeting. During Mr. Crum's pontification, Mr. Frazier contemplates leaving his position as a physical education instructor and returning to his prior position as a trainer for an NFL football team. At least, in the NFL, Mr. Frazier's efforts were greatly appreciated.

Mr. Crum concludes, "Mr. Frazier, I suggest you conform and adhere to the State's physical education curriculum. You have all Summer to review the curriculum, which I strongly suggest you do. As it stands, you are one step away from being put on probation. This year, an official warning will be placed in your file. And, because of your poor performance this past year, I am unable to give you a cost of living adjustment. Do you have any questions?" Mr. Frazier replies, "no." Mr. Crum announces, "good. We're done here. Have a nice day." Mr. Frazier stands up and walks out, clearly not happy with his performance review this year.

The following day during lunch, Mr. Zunde perceives that Mr. Frazier is upset about something. Curious as to what the problem is, Mr. Zunde asks, "is something bothering you, George?" Mr. Frazier replies, "Crum gave me a really shitty performance review. I'm now thinking I should return to the NFL." Mr. Zunde asks, "may I see your review?" Mr. Frazier replies, "sure," and hands to Mr. Zunde Mr. Crum's assessment of one of the best physical education instructors in the State.

Mr. Zunde reviews the assessment form, and tells Mr. Frazier, "this is total garbage, George. If I were you, I would take this directly to Dr. Brooks." Mr. Frazier asks, "what is she going to do?" Mr. Zunde replies, "for one, she can override all this nonsense. And, two, it will put Crum on notice that he is being watched." Mr. Frazier asks, "I wonder if she'll meet with me." Mr. Zunde assures Mr. Crum, "she will. I'm sure of it."

Holding up Mr. Frazier's performance review, Mr. Zunde explains, "this is exactly why Dr. Brooks hired me as the district's athletic director. It's just another chapter in the ongoing John Davies saga. Who knows what Crum has up his sleeve this time. And, besides, George, you significantly contributed to that curriculum. No one knows the curriculum better than you." Mr. Frazier agrees, stating, "I put a lot of work into that curriculum. Maybe I should meet with her." Abruptly ending the discussion, the bell rings, signifying that Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier have to get to class.

Mr. Frazier never did make the appointment to meet with Dr. Brooks, the superintendent of schools. He was planning to do that sometime over the Summer break when he had more time. However, during finals week, Mr. Frazier receives an intra office memo, stating that Dr. Brooks has called a private meeting with him. Mr. Frazier wonders what the meeting arranged by Dr. Brooks will be about. But, he suspects the meeting has

something to do with the unfavorable review he received. Truth be told, Mr. Frazier is sincerely hoping that he does not get fired.

The last bell of the school year finally rings, and Summer begins. Eddie and Kathy meet at the front of the school. They are joined by Braden and, shortly afterwards, Johnson. Since it is a beautiful day, everyone is walking home. Within a few minutes, the whole gang is together, and they head out. Paula mentions, “hey, since we’re all together, does anyone want to get pizza?” Kathy replies, “sure! Why not? It’s the end of the school year and we don’t have to wake up early tomorrow.” It’s not that Kathy or Paula needed a reason to get pizza. Any reason will do when it comes to pizza with this group.

On the way out of the schoolyard, Mark notices Chuckie sitting under a tree with a few others. Mark mentions, “hey, do you want to invite Chuckie?” Everyone knew this was a joke, and they all break out in laughter. Braden sarcastically exclaims, “hey, take a look at that! Chuckie is smoking something!” Kathy quickly mentions, “yeah, pot.” Hearing this, Eddie yells out, “hey, Chuckie! Don’t you know doping² will get you disqualified?” Chuckie yells back, “shut up you bunch of jock heads.” Mark tells Eddie, “look at that. He called you a ‘jock head.’” Braden mentions, “he said, ‘jock heads.’ That’s plural. He’s talking about all of us.” Braden apparently learned something in Miss Starr’s English class this year.

Eddie jokingly cries out, “oh, I’m so hurt. I don’t know if I can take it any more!” Kathy reassures Eddie, “I think you’ll get through this one. I know it’s hard, but you’ll make it.” Kathy, on Eddie’s shoulders, spreads her arms and yells out to Chuckie, “hey, Chuckie! Look at me! I’m an aeroplane!” Mark warns everyone, “you guys better be careful. It looks like Chuckie is the captain of the doping team. He looks tough!” They all then head down the road for the last pizza together of this school year.

² Doping: A slang term for increasing the number of red blood cells to boost athletic performance.