

Eddie, The Ten Year Reunion

Chapter Ten Moving Forward

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Lynn Berson and Penny Hart could hardly wait to see Emily's photography studio that Eddie bought a while ago, especially after hearing Mr. Frazier's speech at the reunion. The Monday following the reunion, Lynn and Penny arrive at Emily's former photography studio at 8:00 a.m., one hour before Eddie planned to meet them. Getting out of her car, Lynn mentions to Penny, "the house looks really beautiful. This parking lot is even awesome!" Penny replies, "yeah. I'd say so." The half-acre parking lot with 100 generous parking spaces is fully equipped with lighting and a small area of covered parking. A brick privacy wall around the sides and back sets the property off from the surrounding businesses, giving it a secluded feel. Lynn and Penny walk around the property, noticing that the building does, in fact, look fully renovated with no expense spared.

Eddie arrives at the service station at 9:00 a.m., as promised. Walking over to the studio, Eddie sees Lynn and Penny sitting on the retaining wall, waiting patiently, or perhaps impatiently, for Eddie to arrive. Eddie yells out to them, "so, what do you think?" Lynn yells out, "it's beautiful!" Walking up to the door, Eddie tells the two overly excited women, "let's take a look inside."

Walking through the front door into the reception area, it's hard not to notice the twelve-foot ceilings and meticulously ornate woodwork. Getting down to business, Eddie points out, "the customer's restroom is right over there." Peeking into the beautifully appointed restroom, Lynn is now wondering how much Eddie is asking for rent. Walking through a door to the well-laid out studio, Eddie mentions, "you guys can take a look around. If you have any questions, I can try to answer them." Penny asks, "how big is this place, anyway?" Eddie replies, "it's a little more than four thousand square feet."

As Lynn and Penny are taking their tour, Eddie mentions, “Mark found a box of cameras and lenses that were left with the property when he was doing the renovation. I asked Emily if she wanted them, and she said ‘no’. You guys can have them if you want.” Lynn asks, “what kind of cameras are they?” Eddie replies, “they’re some off brands, Leica and Hassel something or another.” Lynn exclaims, “are you serious?” Penny exclaims, “Leica and Hasselblad! Those are no off brands!” Eddie mentions, “the cameras are in the darkroom.” Lynn asks, “where is the darkroom, anyway?” Eddie replies, “it’s all the way down the hall, on the left.” The darkroom was appropriately placed as far away from the working studio as possible, as darkroom chemicals have a distinctly unpleasant odor to some people.

Not the least bit bashful in showing their excitement, Lynn and Penny race each other to the darkroom to see what kind of “off brand” cameras to which Eddie was referring. Opening the box, the two professional photographers act more like little kids at Christmas time. Inside, Lynn and Penny find two Hasselblad medium-format cameras used for portrait photography, both of which appear to be in great condition. Inside are also two impressive Leica 35-millimeter cameras with quite a wide variety of fixed lenses. And, the icing on the cake is a Nikon professional quality 35-millimeter SLR camera, complete with an auto winder. Lynn and Penny look at each other as if they’ve discovered a gold mine. Lynn asks Eddie, “did you say we can have these cameras?” Eddie replies, “yeah. You guys can have them even if you don’t rent the place. I really have no use for them.”

While Lynn and Penny are checking out their new cameras, Eddie curiously asks Lynn and Penny, “so, what was your first camera?” Lynn asks, “do you mean my first real camera or my first toy camera?” Eddie replies, “your first real camera.” Lynn replies, “well, my first real camera was a Zenit-19. It’s made in Russia. My father got a new camera, so I got his old one. I still have it today.”

Eddie asks Penny, “and, how about you?” Penny replies, “my first real camera was a Leica IIIf. And, I still have mine today too. I found it in a church rummage sale for twenty dollars. I remember that, when I got it, it looked so complicated. But, with my dad’s help, I figured out how it works.” Lynn tells Penny, “I’m surprised that it even did work. At twenty dollars, it was obvious that they had no idea what they were selling.” Penny replies, “I know! Right?”

After looking around, expecting the rent to be far more than what she is paying now, Lynn asks Eddie, “how much is the rent, anyway?” Eddie asks, “what are you paying now?” Lynn informs Eddie what she is paying for rent at her current location. Eddie generously tells Lynn, “that amount should work.” Lynn, shocked at Eddie’s generosity, replies, “wow! Thank

you so much!" After all, Eddie is just holding on to the land and building, and is not looking to make a profit. If the rent were only to cover the expenses, Eddie is happy.

With the new location instantly becoming a reality, Lynn and Penny meander around, going over every last detail of the studio. Lynn whispers to Penny, "this place is more than I ever expected." Penny replies, "and, with Emily no longer in the business, we could definitely get really, really busy." Recalling Mr. Frazier's motivational speech at the reunion, Lynn tells Penny, "we're doing this. This is what we were born to do." Penny agrees, replying, "this will be way better than newspaper work." Penny is done working for the newspaper, and has no problem expressing it.

Lynn walks up to Eddie, announcing, "I'll take it." Eddie replies, "okay," and hands Lynn two sets of keys. Lynn asks, "don't we need to do a lease and all that sort of stuff?" Eddie replies, "I don't do leases. They're too complicated. The only thing is that, in about fifteen years, I'll probably want the building back." Eddie then tells Lynn, "just bring the check by sometime this week. And, if you want, I can get some of the guys to help you move." Lynn exclaims, "awesome!"

Lynn asks, "would it be okay if Penny and I take the cameras with us to check them out?" Eddie replies, "no problem. They're yours." Lynn and Penny will likely spend the rest of the morning playing with their new toys and developing the film from the reunion this past weekend. In the afternoon, after delivering the pertinent photographs to the police station, they will begin packing up their current studio.

Later that day, Paula drives her Jeep into Eddie's Service Station wanting to get her headlights replaced that Jimmy O'Brien so inconsiderately smashed over the weekend. Walking into the service bay where Eddie is working, Paula announces, "I'm here!" Eddie replies, "hey! You made it!" Paula tells Eddie, "I dropped the kids off at my parents. I didn't think you'd want them running around here making a mess of the place." Eddie tells Paula, "they could always play in the back of the station, or in the gym." Paula replies, "oh yeah. I forgot about that."

Eddie gets the keys from Paula, and drives her Jeep into an empty service bay. As Eddie is replacing the headlights, Paula asks, "has Jimmy O'Brien shown up yet?" Eddie replies, "no. If he got his act together, he's probably flying over the Pacific Ocean right now, on his way home. If he didn't get his act together, he's probably in the hospital where they can't figure out what he's talking about. Or, he could be roaming the streets." Paula asks, "what's O'Brien's problem, anyway?" Eddie explains, "Mark said he has a job stocking shelves in a liquor store. I suppose he's been drinking all his profits." Eddie finishes replacing Paula's headlights, aims them, and Paula is ready to go.

Paula asks Eddie, “how much do I owe you?” Eddie tells her, “don’t worry about it.” Paula asks, “are you sure?” Eddie replies, “yeah. We’re good.” Paula tells Eddie, “thank you so much. I think I’ll get a tank of gas while I’m here.” Paula drives up to the pumps, and fills her gas tank. Eddie, almost done for the day, gets back to work.

Looking out from a service bay, Bobby B. tells Eddie, “I think we got a problem.” Eddie looks outside, seeing Mr. O’Brien yelling at Paula about something. Ready for some entertainment, Eddie tells Bobby B., “it looks like it’s break time. Let’s go see what his problem is.” Eddie and Bobby B. walk outside, seeing Mr. O’Brien out of control, yelling at Paula.

Eddie yells out at Mr. O’Brien, “hey, you! Stop harassing my customers!” Mr. O’Brien yells out as if he is in a panic, “what have you done to Jimmy?” Eddie calmly replies, “I don’t know what you’re talking about, junior. So, stop harassing my customers.” Mr. O’Brien firmly tells Eddie, “I want some answers!” Eddie replies, “yes and no. There are your two answers. So, pick the one you want, and get your communist ass out of here.” Paula laughs, thinking that it is quite funny how Eddie is handling the situation.

Obviously having spoken with Jimmy today, Mr. O’Brien slyly asks Eddie, “did you replace the headlights on that Jeep?” Eddie replies, “what I do here is none of your business, junior. So, get out of here.” Refusing to leave, Mr. O’Brien, in a trembling voice indicating his stress level, informs Eddie, “Jimmy tells me that he broke the headlights on that Jeep, and he expressed deep sorrow for what he did. He even said that he offered to replace them. Jimmy also tells me that you and that Mark guy knocked him out and somehow brought him to Hawaii. He’s trying to get a plane ticket home right now. You have a lot of explaining to do!” Eddie replies, “here’s some explaining, junior. Saturday, at the reunion, Jimmy was so drunk he could barely stand up. He was making a big fool of himself. Everyone was laughing at him. And, here’s some more explaining. I was at the beach yesterday afternoon. There are four dozen witnesses, including two police officers, who saw me there. So, take a hike, junior.” Sounding a bit like Mark, Bobby B. comments, “Jimmy must have been taking too much of that psycho Chubin.”

Mr. O’Brien paces back and forth, exclaiming, “something has got to be done about this!” Eddie calmly advises Mr. O’Brien, “so, do something. You can start by seeing a psychiatrist. I’m sure that, if you drive over to the loony bin over on Central Avenue, they can refer you to one.” Mr. O’Brien, now irate at Eddie’s suggestion that he sees a psychiatrist, exclaims, “there’s nothing wrong with me! You people are the ones with the problem!” Eddie quickly replies, “hey, junior. You’re the one who failed athletes for financial gain, and you were involved in a gambling ring. I’m no expert, but I’d say you have a really bad gambling problem.”

Already well aware of the answer, Bobby B. interjects, asking, “didn’t he go to prison for that?” Eddie replies, “yeah. And so did his drunken son, Jimmy, too.”

Yelling at Eddie, Mr. O’Brien exclaims, “I’m going to file a police report right now! And, I’m going to do everything I can to get you people locked up!” Joining in the verbal wrestling match, Paula comments, “I can see how this is going to go over. What a joke.” Mr. O’Brien sternly warns Paula, “you just wait! You haven’t heard the last of this!” Paula replies, “I’m sure we haven’t. Good luck convincing the police department that Eddie and Mark brought Jimmy to Hawaii. That’s never going to fly. There are too many witnesses who saw them both at the beach on Saturday. Oh, and by the way, filing a false police report is a crime.” Eddie firmly tells Mr. O’Brien, “why don’t you just face it. Jimmy is a loser, and so are you.”

Seeing he is getting absolutely nowhere with either Eddie or Paula, Mr. O’Brien yells out, “you people haven’t heard the last of this!” As Mr. O’Brien walks back to his car, Eddie tells him, “hey! The best thing you can do is tell Jimmy to stay away from the bottle. He apparently has a drinking problem on top of his gambling problem.” Well aware that his son, Jimmy, has a drinking problem, Mr. O’Brien does not respond. Mr. O’Brien drives off, at a loss to know what to do next.

Once Mr. O’Brien is gone, Paula tells Eddie, “that was really funny.” Eddie replies, “it’s not over yet. He’ll be back.” Bobby B. comments, “welcome to life at Eddie’s Service Station.” Paula asks, “do the crazies come in here a lot?” Bobby B. replies, “more often than you think. Most of the time, we just send the crazy people over to the auto repair place down at the department store. So does Jake, across town. The mechanics at the department store are probably wondering why all the crazy people come to them.”

Paula tells Eddie to put her gas on Mark’s tab. Eddie advises Paula, “when you get home, wash your Jeep really good.” Paula asks, “why?” Eddie explains, “the front is kind of dirty and your headlights are brand new.” Quick to understand, Paula replies, “got it.” Eddie also reminds Paula, “there’s no invoice for replacing your headlights, so it never happened.” Paula replies, “that was good thinking.” Paula then heads back to her parent’s house to pick up her kids. Eddie and Bobby B. get back to work, wondering what Mr. O’Brien will do next.

Later that week, after the reunion, Captain Richard Hayes takes a break, and stops by Eddie’s Service Station. Walking into the service area, Richard asks, “what’s up?” Eddie replies, “what’s up?” Richard replies, “I’m taking a break. I thought I’d stop by and give you a few updates.” Eddie asks, “am I in trouble for kicking the shit out of Mr. Crum?” Richard

replies, “not at all. If someone chooses to use deadly force against another person, deadly force would be considered in court to be an appropriate counter measure. That character is really lucky that all you did is kicked the shit out of him. Anywhere else, and this Crum character could have ended up dead.”

Richard reports to Eddie, “speaking about this Maurice Crum character, you really did a number on him.” Eddie asks, “really? Whatever happened to him after the reunion?” Referring to his notes, Richard explains, “he was transported to the county hospital. From what I hear, he’ll be in there for at least two months. Get this. This Crum character ended up with a fractured skull, a fractured jaw, two broken arms, a broken right forearm and wrist, a fractured pelvis, eight missing teeth, a broken nose, severe brain trauma, and two fractured vertebra.” With absolutely no sympathy for the man who made his life so miserable, Eddie comments, “wow! He must have hit the ground really hard when he tripped and fell.” Not missing a beat, Richard replies, “that’s what I think. After all, they did find out that this character had drugs and alcohol in his system.”

Richard informs Eddie, “he’ll be out of commission for a while. And, the good news is there’s enough photographic evidence to put this character away for a long time. I’ll be glad to get him off the streets. Oh, and Penny even caught a picture of a bullet leaving the gun.” Eddie exclaims, “wow! That was a lucky shot!” Richard replies, “I’d say so. That was purely by chance. Lynn and Penny are going to enlarge that photograph for me, and I’m going to hang it in the lobby over at the police station.”

With some interesting news, Richard informs Eddie, “Lynn really got those photos to us quickly. The lab we’ve been using has a two or three-week turnaround time. From now on, the department is going to be using Lynn.” Eddie replies, “Lynn does good work. Lynn developed and printed everything you see on my wall. It’s going to be really convenient having her right next door.” Richard asks, “what’s this? She’s now going to be next door?” Eddie replies, “yeah. I bought the building next door, and Mark renovated it. Lynn and Penny are leasing it, and will be moving in over the weekend.” Richard replies, “that would be really convenient for us, too. We can just drop the film off rather than using a courier. It will be one less person in the chain of custody of the evidence.”

Richard tells Eddie, “you know, the district attorney decided to go after the gold medal in this Crum character’s case.” Not familiar with the type of gold medal to which Richard is referring, Eddie asks, “the gold medal? What’s that?” Richard replies, “the gold medal. The gold medal in a murder or homicide case is first degree murder or attempted murder. She has a solid case. Maurice Crum stole, not bought, a gun. This character

knew exactly when and where the reunion was. He showed up with the gun, fully loaded, clearly planning to use it. Laying on the hospital bed, the few words that character was able to get out were, 'I'm going to kill Eddie.' Planned, attempted to execute, and no remorse. That's the makings of first degree attempted murder."

Eddie asks, "what's the sentence for first degree attempted murder?" Richard replies, "in this State, usually life in prison. He's going to put in at least thirty years before he's eligible for parole." Eddie laughs, and informs Richard, "Braden's father is not going to be too happy with that." Quite familiar with Mr. Crum's prior stay in prison, Richard informs Eddie, "the last time this Crum character was in prison, he got the red carpet treatment. Lifers aren't going to be coddled with fuzzy blankets every time they get cold, or shipped off to the infirmary every time they break a fingernail."

Glad to deliver the news to Eddie that Mr. Crum will be off the streets for a long time, Richard heads out. Eddie gets back to work, happy to hear that Mr. Crum and his dilapidated Volkswagen Beetle will not be showing up at the service station ever again. Best of all, Mr. Crum will not be showing up at Eddie's Service Station with a gun for at least thirty years. By then, Mr. Crum will be in his mid-eighties if he makes it that long.

Working on the case of someone in the area selling alcohol to a minor, Erika had her work cut out for her figuring out which liquor store was the culprit. After Mark revealing that O'Brien works in a liquor store, Erika's work might have got just a little easier. Erika decides to move forward, and test the theory. If she is right in her assessment, one very large problem will be solved.

One Friday night, about two weeks after the reunion, Erika has an undercover officer shop in a liquor store. The undercover officer is the same officer who played the part of Mack when it came to busting Dean Grimsby years ago, and also played the part of Jackson Finley when Mayor Bradford Jamieson was busted and taken in. Today, the undercover officer is going by the name of Frank. Frank, dressed in a suit and tie as a successful business man, presents as having a long week at work, and is shopping for a good bottle of wine that he can enjoy with his wife.

Also shopping tonight is Frank's sixteen-year-old daughter, who is going by the name Janice. Dressed quite inappropriately for her age, Janice is hoping to walk out with her own bottle of wine, preferably one that tastes sweet and has a screw top. Protecting Janice and backing up Frank are the two undercover officers who played the part of Mad Dog and Bad Dog when Dean Grimsby was taken in by the authorities. Mad Dog

and Bad Dog are hanging out on the street, making sure everything goes as planned.

Frank confidently walks into the liquor store, giving the impression he knows exactly what he wants. Seeing the well-dressed customer, O'Brien tells Frank, "if I can help you, let me know." Frank acknowledges O'Brien's remark by simply nodding. Walking back to the fine wine section, O'Brien senses that Frank's knowledge of wine is far beyond his own. O'Brien, as to not show his ignorance, lets Frank shop peacefully. O'Brien's response is exactly what Frank was hoping for.

Janice walks in very shortly afterward. O'Brien, seeing the suggestively dressed female, asks, "can I help you find something?" Janice replies, "sure," as she walks back to the inexpensive wine section, swinging her hips on her way. O'Brien follows, watching Janice perhaps a little too closely.

Clearly sending the message that she has shopped for wine before, Janice tells O'Brien, "here it is. This is exactly what I wanted." Janice bends down slowly, grabbing the bottle of wine from the bottom shelf. Handing the bottle to O'Brien, Janice tells him, "here. Hold this for a minute for me, please."

Taking a moment to straighten her undersized outfit, Janice asks O'Brien, "so, what's your story, sweetie?" O'Brien asks, "my story?" Janice replies, "yeah, your story. Everyone has a story." Not really having an impressive past, as they are walking to the cash register, O'Brien tells Janice, "when I was in high school, I was a track star. Now, I mostly invest money in a few unconventional ways." O'Brien, of course, is full of shit. Janice exclaims, "wow! A track star. I can definitely see that!" Wanting to impress Janice, O'Brien replies, "I'm still training."

At the checkout counter, O'Brien asks Janice, "do you have an ID?" Leaning over the counter, Janice smiles and whispers, "I have a learner's permit. Is that okay?" O'Brien boldly replies, yet whispering, "if you don't have an ID, you'll have to leave me a tip. House rules." Playing along, Janice whispers to O'Brien, "sure, sweetie. I can do that for you. How much would make your night?" O'Brien replies, "I usually get five bucks for a bottle of wine. But, I'll leave it up to you."

O'Brien rings up the bottle of wine. Janice searches through her purse and hands over the money. O'Brien gives Janice the change, waiting for his tip. Janice hands O'Brien a ten-dollar tip, telling him, "thank you so much, sweetie. See you around." O'Brien replies, "definitely. And, come back sometime." Janice walks toward the door, leaving with her bottle of wine and the receipt. O'Brien stuffs the ten-dollar bill into his pocket, adding it to the rest of the money he made on the side tonight.

Outside, out of view of O'Brien, Janice hands the merchandise to Mad Dog, who tells her, "good job." Janice replies, "that was a piece of cake." Janice removes her wire, also handing it to Mad Dog. Mad Dog asks Janice, "did you remember to use the marked bills?" Janice replies, "yeah. That's the only money I had." Mad Dog, however, was messing with Janice. Meanwhile, Bad Dog radios Erika, informing her that the operation was a success. Inside, Frank, also knowing the operation was a success, has selected that one very special bottle of wine, and is absolutely in no rush to get to the checkout counter.

Mad Dog moves Janice to a safe location, far out of the way of any potential confrontation. Specifically, the police do not want O'Brien to ever see Janice again. Erika drives up, parking in front of the liquor store. Inside, Frank is positioned to make sure O'Brien and his co-worker do not escape through the back door. Bad Dog guards the front door, unofficially closing the liquor store, preventing anyone from entering.

Erika walks in, announcing, "Jimmy O'Brien? It's so nice to see you again." O'Brien bitterly asks, "did you guys figure out how they got me to Hawaii?" Erika replies, "no, Jimmy. I'm sorry. We haven't. We're still working on it." Erika places her hand on her gun, and continues, "but, we have figured out that you've been selling alcohol to minors. So, I'm here to arrest you. Please place your hands over your head." Hearing the news, O'Brien exclaims, "I never sold alcohol to a minor! It wasn't me!"

With a sudden change in composure, Erika exclaims, "hands over your head! Now!" O'Brien concedes, and places his hands over his head. Erika tells him, "now, walk out from behind the counter slowly! And, don't make any sudden moves." O'Brien complies, yet exclaiming, "you got the wrong person! It wasn't me!" Somehow, O'Brien thinks he can finagle his way out of getting arrested.

Still not believing what is happening, O'Brien exclaims, "I'm telling you! It wasn't me!" Erika explains, "the girl that you just sold a bottle of wine to is sixteen years old. That would make her a minor. That would put you in the position of selling alcohol to a minor. Any questions?" O'Brien exclaims, "she had ID!" Not listening to O'Brien's excuses, Erika cuffs O'Brien, arrests him, and reads him his rights. O'Brien is taken away, still maintaining his innocence.

Frank and Bad Dog take care of business inside the store, explaining the situation to O'Brien's co-worker. The employee cooperates fully with the police, not wanting to find himself in the same situation as O'Brien. The liquor store is officially closed for the evening by Frank, and crime scene tape is placed over the doors. The employee is sent home, and instructed not to reenter the premises. The bad news for the owner is

that he will likely have to attend a court hearing where he will have a lot of explaining to do.

Early the next week, Eddie comes home from work, seeing Kathy hard at work. Seeing a spread of papers on the dining room table, Eddie asks, "wow! What are you up to, Katarina?" Kathy replies, "I'm counting our money and adding up all of our assets." Eddie asks, "really? Why?" Kathy replies, "because I want to know how much we have." Knowing that he and Kathy have enough money, Eddie asks, "why the sudden curiosity?" Kathy replies, "because I don't know exactly how much we have."

Knowing Kathy is up to something, Eddie tells Kathy, "okay, Katarina Karakova, out with it." Kathy smiles, and replies, "out with what? And, by the way, it's Katarina Bogenskaya now. Don't tell me you forgot." Eddie tells Kathy, "it's kind of obvious that you're up to something. It's all these vague non answers to simple questions that gives it away." Kathy relents, telling Eddie, "okay. So, I'm adding up all of our assets because me and Paula are having a race." Eddie laughs, and replies, "since when do you have to know what your assets are before you race?" Kathy replies, "it's not a running race. We're having a race to two-hundred-fifty-million dollars."

Eddie asks, "really? Who's winning?" Kathy replies, "I am." Eddie asks, "by how much?" Kathy replies, "by a few million." Eddie asks, "so, how much do we have?" Kathy replies, "about 248 million dollars. Paula only has 234 million. She's going to lose." Eddie comments, "wow! You guys have been competing with each other since grade school." Kathy replies, "yeah. And, I always win." Paula, were she present, would strongly disagree that Kathy always wins.

Thinking for a moment, Eddie asks, "why am I working?" Kathy replies, "because, you wanted to be a mechanic." Eddie replies, "well, if we have 248 million dollars, I'm cutting back to three days a week." Kathy tells Eddie, "that would be a good idea, especially since we'll have another baby soon. And, Eddie, Junior will be going to school. There will be a lot to do around here before the baby comes." Eddie asks, "like what?" Kathy replies, "well, you know. Like stuff around the house." As far as Eddie knows, there is not much to do around the house. With maintenance always high on Eddie's list, everything around the house is in perfect condition.

Now knowing for sure that Kathy is up to something again, Eddie asks, "like what kind of stuff is there to do around the house, Katarina?" Kathy replies, "you know. Little stuff that we have to do before the baby comes. Like adding two bedrooms, and that sort of stuff." Eddie repeating partially what Kathy said, responds, "little stuff, like adding two bedrooms. Hmm. That's not exactly little stuff." Kathy energetically

replies, “well, yeah. But, we can take out the bathroom on the other side of the house, and put in a hallway to two more bedrooms and two bathrooms.” Eddie agrees, telling Kathy, “that’s actually a really great plan. While we’re at it, we can probably add a playroom for the kids.” Kathy smiles, glad to hear that Eddie likes her plan.

Eddie points out, “you know, if we hire Mark to do the work, Paula could gain on your race to two-hundred-fifty-million dollars.” Kathy replies, “no, she won’t.” Eddie asks, “how can you be so confident?” Kathy stands up, and replies, “because I put a shit load of money in the stock market and, by the end of the month, I’ll emerge as the winner! So, I already won!” Eddie replies, “well, I’ll get Mark over here sometime and see what he thinks.” Kathy smiles, happy that she’ll have a little more space for the kids.

Almost as an afterthought, Eddie casually asks Kathy, “have you counted what’s in the safe at the service station?” Kathy suddenly yells out, “no! I forgot about that!” As she is quickly shuffling a few papers, Kathy asks, “how much do we have there?” Eddie replies, “I don’t know. There’s at least three-thousand ounces of gold, and I have no idea how much cash. It just keeps accumulating.” Now more excited, Kathy asks, “can you count it for me sometime? I could have already won!” Eddie explains, “if we have 248 million dollars, you won.” Doing a little math in her head, Kathy exclaims, “yes! I won!” Eddie laughs, wondering how Kathy and Paula decided to have a race to two-hundred-fifty-million dollars. But, after all, Kathy and Paula have always been in competition with each other.

Now curious, Eddie asks Kathy, “so, what exactly did you win by winning?” Kathy replies, “a pizza.” Eddie laughs, and tells Kathy, “I should have known.”

Monday morning, as Eddie is opening the service station, Captain Richard Hayes drives in. Captain Hayes actually visits Eddie’s Service Station more often now that he is a police captain. One can easily conclude that the officer misses patrolling the streets, and gets out of the office every chance he gets. Captain Hayes also visits Lynn Berson’s photography studio quite often, delivering film obtained by the detectives that needs to be developed. Captain Hayes helps himself to a bagel and coffee, which was just delivered, and takes a seat in the office.

Eddie asks Richard, “what’s up?” Richard replies, “I really didn’t want to come to work this week. School is going to start in a few weeks, and I’ll be away on vacation next week. I guess, in my head, I’m on vacation a week early.” Eddie tells Richard, “I know what you mean. I didn’t feel like coming to work today either. And, Eddie, Junior is starting kindergarten this year. So, Eddie asks me, ‘am I going to learn how to fix cars in

kindergarten?’ He was kind of disappointed when I told him he wasn’t.” Richard replies, “it sounds like you have a mechanic in training.” Eddie laughs, and informs Richard, “I think so. At home, he’s always watching me when I’m working on cars. And occasionally, he comes to work here with me.”

Eddie asks, “where are you guys going on vacation?” Richard replies, “we’re headed down to the Bahamas for a week. Sandy is really looking forward to it. And, I can see it now. The kids aren’t going to want to leave. And, when we get back, it’s back to school for them.” Richard, following Eddie’s investment advice, has been able to take some really nice vacations over the years.

Once Eddie and Richard catch up on their personal lives, Richard informs Eddie, “you’re not going to believe this. This Jimmy O’Brien character has claimed you and Mark transported him to Hawaii.” Eddie laughs, and exclaims, “not this crap again! Has O’Brien been talking to the Chuckie?” Richard replies, “you would think. And, this O’Brien character’s father is demanding a full scale investigation. I tell you. These characters are a real piece of work. If it was up to me, I’d round them all up and ship them off to that facility over on Central Avenue.”

Eddie tells Richard, “I can tell you exactly what happened, if you want.” Richard asks, “really? What’s that?” Eddie informs Richard, “at the reunion, O’Brien was overindulging in alcohol. So, Mark told O’Brien, ‘the more you weigh, the more the alcohol affects you.’ O’Brien is so stupid that he actually believed Mark. So, O’Brien, since he weighs a little more than a hundred pounds, tested Mark’s theory. Anyway, O’Brien got seriously drunk and made a fool of himself during the whole reunion. Actually, O’Brien doesn’t need to be drunk to make a fool of himself. He does that quite well without alcohol. So, anyway, O’Brien told Mark, ‘I’m going to get you back for this! You just wait!’ I heard it. Bobby B., Erika, Johnson, Barbara, and a few others heard it too. I guess this Hawaii shit was the payback. He should have come up with something better than that Hawaii crap all over again. I thought the Chuckie wore that one out.”

Richard asks, “did you talk to Erika over the weekend?” Eddie replies, “no. Bobby B. and Erika didn’t make it to pizza Saturday morning. After pizza, I had a few things around the house to do. And, we were in our pool a lot.” Richard explains, “Erika worked late Friday night. That’s probably why she didn’t make it. Erika took this O’Brien character in late Friday night. The undercover officers caught him selling alcohol to a minor.” Not surprised, Eddie replies, “that’s probably only the tip of the iceberg.” Raising his eyebrows, Richard asks, “really?” Eddie replies, “yeah. We’re talking about Jimmy O’Brien here. I’ve never known O’Brien and his father to do anything legitimately. They’re a bunch of communist crooks. And, they’re not even good at being crooks. Besides, it sounds to

me like the Chuckie and O'Brien are taking the same kind of dope." Richard replies, "I can't say I disagree."

Eddie asks, "how much time will O'Brien be doing?" Richard replies, "in this State, the sale of alcohol to a minor is a misdemeanor. Since he works in a liquor store, and supposedly knows better, this O'Brien character is going to get more than a slap on the wrist. This character will probably get close to the maximum, which is 90 days in jail, plus a fine." Eddie replies, "then, he'll be back on the streets doing something else underhanded."

With some good news, Richard reveals, "but, with this O'Brien character off the streets, we'll see if the underage drinking problem slows down for a while." Eddie asks, "how would you know?" Richard replies, "all you have to do is look for the empty bottles behind any school or in any park. Another good place to find them is along the expressway service road, in the area where the road is lined with businesses. We know where the kids hang out. And, now that school is going to be back in session, the problem is expected to get worse, especially on Friday and Saturday night." Richard knows everything that goes on around town, far more than anyone would ever suspect. And, if Richard knows, his officer's know as well.

Bobby B. rolls into the station, driving his Dune Buggy. Walking into the office and seeing Captain Hayes, Bobby B. asks, "what's up?" Eddie replies, "we were just talking about O'Brien getting busted." Bobby B. laughs, and exclaims, "first, the Chuckie goes down in flames! And now, O'Brien gets burned by alcohol! I've never thought I'd see Erika this happy getting these guys off the streets." Richard replies, "Erika is a good officer. She knows her stuff. She really deserved the promotion she got." Bobby B. laughs, and mentions, "but, she's running out of crazy people to arrest." Richard chuckles, and replies, "trust me. We'll never run out of crazy people out there. You take one in, and two more appear in their place." Eddie, Bobby B., and Richard talk for a while longer, catching up on their weekend.

Once Richard heads back to the police station, Eddie still does not feel like working today. Eddie sits at his desk, and asks Bobby B., "what do you have going on back in the shop?" Bobby B. replies, "I'm rebuilding the head on that piece of shit sports car that overheated." Eddie asks, "how much did you have to shave it?" Bobby B. replies, "one millimeter, this time. The same engine overheated two years ago, and I shaved it a millimeter then." Eddie tells Bobby B., "that's a serious problem with those guys. You can't put an aluminum head on a cast iron block. When the thermostat fails and the car overheats by five degrees, it costs at least a thousand bucks." Bobby B. tells Eddie, "the guy won't be back until next

week to pick it up. So, if there's something else that you want me to work on, I can fit it in."

Unexpectedly walking through the door, Lynn Berson announces, "I'm moving in!" Eddie replies, "that's really great!" Lynn informs Eddie of the plan, explaining, "we have a lot of stuff to move, so it will probably take us a few days. So, me and Penny will be in and out over the next week." Eddie asks, "did you hire movers?" Lynn replies, "no. With movers, everything has to be boxed up. It's a serious pain to box up all my studio equipment. And, the last thing I'm going to do is let movers destroy it all. So, we're moving everything a little at a time." Eddie asks, "do you need any help?" Lynn replies, "when we get to the big stuff I will. But, that will probably be Wednesday or Thursday."

Not really wanting to work on cars today, Eddie tells Lynn, "if you want, me and Bobby B. can help you move." Lynn replies, "if you guys have the time, I would be really, really grateful!" Eddie, volunteering Bobby B's. time as well as his own, tells Lynn, "sure. We can help you." Suddenly more excited, Lynn thinks she might be able to pull the move off in one or two days. Lynn accepts Eddie's offer, telling him, "sure! If you have the time!"

Eddie tells Lynn, "okay. I'll drive home, get my Dune Buggy, head over to Second Street and pick up the trailer." Lynn exclaims, "wait! You have a trailer, too?" Eddie replies, "yeah. I'm guessing you want the enclosed trailer." At a loss for words, Lynn exclaims, "wow! Sure!" Eddie tells Bobby B., "I'm going home and get my Dune Buggy. Man the station until I get back." Bobby B. takes a seat behind the desk, reading the morning newspaper. While Eddie heads home, Lynn heads over to her new studio, unloading the few items that she was able to fit in her Mustang.

By late afternoon, Eddie and Bobby B. have all of Lynn's photography equipment and furniture moved from her old studio to her new studio. Lynn and Penny spend a few minutes unpacking a couple of items, but are ready to call it a day. Truth be told, Eddie and Bobby B.'s pace was a bit fast for Lynn and Penny. But, they'll have the rest of the week to get situated, which will be quite easy compared with their original plan. Eddie and Bobby B. also call it a day, and head home.

As the Summer comes to a close, the group meets at the county pool for their annual reunion. As the morning moves on, everyone trickles in a few at a time. Instead of a row of eight matching Dune Buggies, now that many in the group have kids, there are a few matching Volkswagen Busses in the parking lot. Joining the group this year is Angela Meadows, from the television station, Karen Corey, who ran track at the University years ago, Lynn Berson, Penny Hart, Daniel Gaspari, Darryl Stone, Mr. Frazier, Coach Athena Leighton, and a few others.

The Summer reunion still brings the annual 100-yard freestyle rematch between Tessa and Eddie. Eddie kicked Tessa's butt the day after the reunion in a 200-yard freestyle ocean swim, and Tessa knows it. Tessa, although she doesn't display it, is very worried that Eddie will beat her this year. Eddie, as Tessa has come to expect, is making no comment this year about how or if he's been training. Truth be told, Tessa is already psyched up, and wants this race over with as soon as possible.

Walking into the pool area, Kathy tells Eddie, "they got a new sign." Reading the sign aloud, Kathy reads, "Lifeguard on Duty." Reading the smaller print at the bottom of the sign, Kathy reads, "Please use caution. There is no lifeguard on duty in the gene pool." Eddie laughs, and replies, "that's really funny! I want one of those for our pool!" Kathy and Eddie walk toward the deep end of the pool, where their friends are sitting at the tables, and take a seat.

At one of the tables, as they are relaxing, Braden tells Mark, "I'm gonna need your help again." Mark asks, "what's up?" Braden replies, "I bought the house next door to me. I want to knock it down." Quite surprised, Mark interrupts, and asks, "why do you want to knock it down?" Braden replies, "Wendy really wants an organic vegetable garden. I also want to make a place that Wendy can use her telescope where there ain't gonna be any lights from the house bothering her. And, our whole back yard is taken up by the pool, the patio, and my outdoor kitchen. And, I can't exactly put a vegetable garden in my front yard."

Hearing the discussion between Braden and Mark, Wendy leaves the table where she is seated and pulls up a chair. Wendy asks Mark, "can you knock the house down for us?" Mark replies, "sure. No problem. All we have to do is get a demolition permit, and start knocking it down." Mark then asks, "does it have a basement?" Braden replies, "no." Mark informs Braden, "that will make it easier. If it had a basement, it's a pain in the ass to demolish the concrete walls. And, we'd also have to bring in a shit load of fill dirt."

Braden tells Mark, "here's what I was thinking. I want to continue my wall around that property, and put in a gate in my back yard to get to the garden." Mark explains, "we can do that. And, you might want to put a large gate in the front yard, in case you want to drive a vehicle into the garden someday. You might also want to leave the water service on for that property, and get John to put in an irrigation system. And, remember, there's a fifteen-foot setback for the wall from the road." Braden replies, "I'll just fill the front in with grass, and put in a park bench so people can sit and talk." Wanting to expand her plant collection, Wendy suggests, "we can put a few plants outside the wall, too." With less lawn to cut, Braden replies, "that sounds good to me!"

Braden asks, “can you put my job on your schedule?” Mark replies, “sure. I can go down on Monday, and apply for the demolition permit. In the meantime, draw up some rough plans of what you want.” Now all excited, Wendy tells Mark, “I’ll take care of that.” Wendy is taking no chances. She will make sure her garden is laid out exactly the way she wants. Best of all, Wendy likes the fact that Mark makes construction sound so easy.

Arriving last to the party is Johnson, who comments to Mark, “this should be a peaceful day. All the riffraff is in jail.” Mark replies, “let’s see. Chuckie’s in jail with that Goldshit guy and that bitchkrieg girl, Terry Haynes. Mr. Crum is back in jail. O’Brien is in jail. McCrutchen and Evans are in jail. Did I miss anybody?” Johnson smiles, telling Mark, “that’s about it. Those guys all take the gold medal in causing trouble.”

Mark asks Johnson, “does any of that shit still go on at the high school that happened when we were there?” Johnson replies, “sure it does. But, I see it from the other side now.” Mark asks, “really? Like what?” Johnson explains, “the left side of the storage building you built is the favorite place for the students to hang out and smoke pot before school and at lunch. You can’t see that side of the building from the school or from the administration building. If someone is cutting class, that’s probably the first place you’ll find them.” Mark confesses, “I never thought about that when me and my dad put that building up.”

Johnson asks Mark, “do you remember the guy on the high school track team, Eddie Lee Washington?” Mark replies, “yeah. He was actually really good.” Johnson replies, “he is. He reminds me a lot of Braden. So, there’s a guy in his class, Mike Zucker. Zucker is pretty much the class idiot.” Mark asks, “like the Chuckie?” Johnson replies, “more like the Chuckie and Jimmy O’Brien all rolled into one.”

Johnson explains, “so, Zucker was being a pain in the ass last year, and started messing with Washington. Washington is kind of quiet off the track, and just ignored Zucker. During a flag football game in gym class, Washington got his flag pulled by Jason Osborne, who is also on the track team. After Washington got his flag pulled, Zucker decided to act a little cool, and tackled Washington from behind.” Mark laughs, and comments, “that probably didn’t go over too well.” Johnson replies, “it didn’t. But, for the moment, Washington let it go.”

Johnson continues, “so, get this. That day, the quarterback of Zucker’s team was Jason Osborne. When Osborne’s team got possession of the ball, Washington told his buddy, Osborne, ‘hand the ball off to Zucker. He’s all mine.’ Osborne agreed. Washington then told his team to stay out of the way, and he’ll take care of Zucker. So, the ball is snapped, and Osborne hands off to Zucker. Washington charges Zucker,

picks him up, and runs with Zucker over his shoulder to the end zone. When Washington got to the end zone, he slammed Zucker to the ground, and yelled out, 'safety! Two points!' Zucker was really slow to get up after that." Mark laughs, and tells Johnson, "that must have been kind of funny. I wish I was there to see that."

Johnson finishes the story, telling Mark, "when Zucker got back from the end zone, he was really mad, and yelled out at me, 'did you see that?' I told him, 'well, you wanted to play tackle. Deal with it.' Zucker was ticked off, but that's the way it goes." Mark observes, "wow! Not much has changed."

Johnson thinks for a moment, and asks Mark, "do you want to hear a really good one?" Mark replies, "sure." Johnson explains, "some of the students found a way to get on the roof. From what the girls who got caught said, they've been going up there for years. One girl was a senior, and she said that she's been going up on the roof since she was a freshman. And, get this. When she was a freshman, one of the seniors told her that she has been going up there for four years. So, that's been going on for at least seven years, and no one knew about it." Now curious, Mark mentions, "I wonder if that was going on when we were in school." Johnson replies, "it probably was. We just never knew about it."

Mark asks, "what's the big deal about going out on the roof? I mean, I'm guessing there's not much to do up there." Johnson replies, "there were a dozen students going up there, laying out in the sun when they should have been in class. They even had chaise lounges up on the roof." Mark laughs, and exclaims, "wow! How did they catch them?" Johnson replies, "I caught them. I was out on the track one Spring with my PE class, and I saw them up on the roof from a distance when they stood up. If I didn't catch them that day, they'd be up there next year too."

Mark asks, "so, how did they get on the roof, anyway?" Johnson explains, "Mr. Barrett never locks the door to the band room. But, here's the problem. The band room adjoins the auditorium. The band room is where the actors all hang out during a school play until their part comes up. So, you can walk from the band room right out onto the stage. In the auditorium, there's a stairway backstage going up to the catwalk where the lighting is. At the other end of the catwalk there's a door leading to the roof." Mark asks, "wow! How did they solve that problem?" Johnson replies, "they put a deadbolt on the door in the band room leading to the auditorium. So, now you need a key to get onto the stage. Before that, there was no lock on that door."

Getting everyone's immediate attention, Barbara announces, "it's time for the annual rematch between Eddie and Tessa! Afterwards, we all can have lunch." Mark and Johnson stand up, and walk to the pool's edge.

While they are waiting for the race to begin, Mark asks Johnson, “who was that girl that had a really good suntan every year when we were in school?” Johnson asks, “are you talking about Nicole and Roberta?” Mark replies, “yeah! Nicole. That’s her name! Now I’m wondering if she was up on the roof laying out when we were in school.” Mark thinks for a moment, then comments, “now, I’m going to look through my yearbook and see if she was in the school play. Those actors and stage crew people probably knew all about how to get on the roof.” Johnson replies, “just like we knew every square inch of the track.”

Tessa walks over to Eddie, telling him, “I hope you’re ready. This is a pool, buddy, not an ocean.” Eddie looks around at the water, and replies, “really? So, that’s what that thing is in my back yard.” Reminding Eddie of last year’s race that she won, Tessa tells Eddie, “I’ve been training in the ocean since our little race at the beach. I’m beating you again this year, buddy!” Reminding Tessa of the outcome of the ocean swim, Eddie replies to Tessa, “that’s what you said a few weeks ago. And, this is this year.” Concerned, yet displaying confidence, Tessa reminds Eddie, “I beat you three years in a row. Let that sink in.”

Kathy walks over to Laura, the senior lifeguard who is also a student at the University, telling her that Eddie and Tessa are ready for their annual race. This year, Gina, a first-year lifeguard at the pool, is asked if she would like to join the race. Without hesitation, Gina, who also attends the University, agrees. Eddie, Tessa, and Gina get warmed up, ready to fight it out for the title of this year’s winner. As the swimmers are warming up, Barbara whispers to Kathy and Paula, “Gina, the lifeguard, obviously has some experience. Look at how she’s warming up.” Kathy and Paula both observe that Gina might just have some advanced experience in the water.

Laura asks the three nervous racers if everyone is ready. Answering for the group, Tessa confidently replies, “let’s get this show on the road!” Eddie takes lane two, Tessa takes lane three, and Gina lane four. Walking along the edge of the pool, Laura tells everyone to step back four feet from the pool’s edge. The crowd lining the pool’s edge gets larger, with many spectators wondering what the big attraction is.

Laura announces, “take your mark.” With everyone in position, Laura blows her whistle. Eddie, Tessa, and Gina dive in, giving the spectators the impression that they have done this at least once before. Halfway through the first lap, Eddie is in the lead, as Tessa has come to expect. Eddie’s leg strength always affords him the lead right off the block. Tessa gains on Eddie, and arrives at the wall first, surprising Eddie. Eddie touches the wall second and, with a powerful flip turn, gains on Tessa, taking the lead. Gina, quite surprised at the level of her competition,

touches third and, with a flawlessly artistic flip turn, swims underwater for a prolonged distance, and catches up to her competitors.

During the second lap of the four-lap race, showing Kathy her stopwatch, Barbara mentions to Kathy, “check this out, girl. They’re swimming a world class time!” Kathy reminds Barbara, “they’ve all been training hard over the last few years. Eddie has been swimming a bit more this year.” Barbara replies, “Eric works out every day at the high school. It’s really quite funny in a way when the track coach is the fastest person in every event. It really makes the team work harder.” Tessa, in the lead during most of the second lap, approaches the wall and takes the lead in the third lap. At the end of the second lap, Eddie is in second place, and Gina is in third place.

During the third lap, getting the distinct impression that she is up against some serious competition, Gina makes up some lost ground. Seeing Eddie take the lead, Kathy comments, “it looks like Eddie found his afterburner.” Seeing Eddie pull ahead, Barbara replies, “I see that! Eddie’s 50-yard split was 23 seconds!” Kathy observes, “whoever this Gina girl is, she’s pretty good.” Not ever seeing Gina before, Paula, who has been quietly watching the race, replies, “she’s probably on a swimming team somewhere.”

Early in the last lap, Eddie maintains first place. Tessa gives it all she has, and makes up a little ground. The cheering from the sidelines gets louder as the end of the race draws near. The swimmers rapidly approach the finish and, at the wall this year, Eddie touches first, beating Tessa by a few yards. Tessa touches the wall second, beating Gina by a few yards. Gina touches third, delivering quite a respectable performance.

Barbara announces to the crowd, “the winner this year is Eddie, with a time of 50.6 seconds, who won by a few yards!” Eddie gives Tessa a high-five, moves into Gina’s lane, where he and Tessa give Gina a high-five. Gina tells Eddie and Tessa, “you guys are fast!” Tessa tells Gina, “you’re pretty fast, yourself.”

The three swimmers get out of the pool, where Gina carefully looks over her opponents. Desperately wanting to know, Gina asks, “okay. I have to know. Who are you guys, anyway?” Answering for her and Eddie, Tessa replies, “I’m Tessa Hoffer, previously Tessa Klement. And, this guy over here who was really lucky today is Eddie Bogenskaya.” Gina exclaims, “wait! You’re Tessa Klement?” Tessa replies, “that’s me.” Gina yells out, “you mean, the Tessa Klement that owns the national record in the 100 and 200-meter freestyle?” Tessa replies, “yeah. That’s me. And, I can’t believe my records still stand.” Gina tells Tessa, “last year, Nena Dotsenrod came close, but she suddenly dropped out of the swimming circuit.” Tessa now knows for sure that Gina is a collegiate swimmer.

Tessa informs Gina, “and, this is Eddie Bogenskaya, the fastest man in the world on land, but not in the pool.” Eddie laughs at Tessa’s commentary, and tells Gina, “it’s nice to meet you.” Slightly upset that she lost the race, Tessa boasts to Gina, “I beat Eddie in this race the last three years in a row. Eddie apparently has more training secrets. I’ll have to beat them out of him at lunch.” Eddie tells Gina, “why don’t you join us for lunch. I’ll spill all my secrets over pizza.” Wanting to hear any potential training secrets, Gina replies, “I think I will. Thank you so much.”

After the competition, Eddie and Tessa take a seat at a table with Mr. Frazier and Coach Leighton. Gina, quite surprised to see Coach Leighton at the pool with the group, joins them. Taking a seat, Gina asks Coach Leighton, “aren’t you Dr. Leighton from the University?” Coach Leighton replies, “I am. But, today, please call me Athena.” Gina tells Athena, “I had you for my Advanced Physical Conditioning class last year.” Knowing that the advanced physical conditioning class is exclusively for athletes, Athena replies, “you must be on one of our sports teams.” Gina replies, “swimming.” Athena also knows that Gina, being on a sports team, received a grade of A in the class. At Eddie’s table, the discussion revolves around the University’s athletic program.

Once lunch is nearly over, Tessa finally gets the chance to ask Eddie, “it’s time for you to spill your secrets, buddy.” Eddie tells Tessa, “I told you. I’ve been swimming in the ocean.” Tessa exclaims, asking, “that’s it?” Eddie replies, “that, and the rest of the training secrets I’ve told you over the years.” Tessa asks, “nothing else? Ocean swimming is the only thing you added?” Pointing to the pool, Eddie replies, “yeah. Swimming in the ocean is hard work. It’s a lot harder than swimming in that little puddle over there.”

Wanting to gain a competitive edge in the pool, Gina asks, “what are the other training secrets?” Eddie replies, “I invented a weight and pulley system to mimic the strokes used in swimming. By adding resistance, you can better develop the muscles used in any of the strokes. And, I swim in my pool with my clothes on, creating lots of drag. In a way, it also simulates swimming against resistance.” Tessa adds, “and, it really works.” Eddie, Tessa, and Gina discuss a few more training secrets, as Eddie and Tessa come to find out that Gina, who will be a junior this year, swims for the University.

At another table, Braden catches Erika looking around carefully, as if she is expecting an unwanted visitor. Braden tells Erika, “you’re looking around like you’re expecting trouble.” Erika replies, “McCrutchen and Evans got bailed out this past week. I’m half thinking they might show up again someday.” Braden laughs, and tells Erika, “we’ll just kick their ass again.”

Erika smiles, and asks Braden, “guess who posted their bond?” Braden replies, “I have no idea. Who was dumb enough to bail their asses out?” Erika replies, “some guy named Larry Gable. He’s the track coach at one of the universities in the division.” Braden asks, “I thought McCrutchen and Evans worked for Dogpatch University.” Erika suggests, “it sounds like they got jobs at Dr. Gable’s university now that Dr. Nicholson is in hot water.”

Hearing Erika and Braden mention Larry Gable’s name catches the attention of Coach Athena Leighton and Mr. Frazier, who are sitting at an adjacent table talking with Gina. Athena turns around, asking Erika, “what’s this I hear about Larry Gable?” Erika explains, “a little while ago, at Eddie’s house, Todd McCutchen and Brad Evans got arrested for vandalism and trespassing. Larry Gable posted their bond.” Eddie comments, “with Dr. Nicholson in jail, it sounds like McCrutchen and Evans jumped ship, and work for Dr. Gable now.” Erika and Eddie bring Mr. Frazier and Athena up to date on their latest encounter with McCutchen and Evans.

Hearing of the altercation with McCutchen and Evans, Mr. Frazier laughs, announcing, “just when you think there’s smooth sailing ahead, now there’s this.” Athena replies, “I can’t wait to hear about this next month during the coach’s meeting. If they won’t bring it up, I most certainly will.” Eddie mentions, “at least one thing is for certain. If Dr. Gable hired McCrutchen and Evans, he’s definitely up to something. And, it’s a dead giveaway that Dr. Gable’s team sucks this year.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, “you’re probably spot on. Gable’s team usually occupies the basement, along with that other guy, whatever his name is.” Athena asks Mr. Frazier, “would you be talking about Peter Gregory?” Mr. Frazier nods his head, and replies, “that’s the guy.”

Athena sits back and thinks for a moment, then comments, “McCutchen and Evans must be bringing something of a highly perceived value to the table for Dr. Nicholson, and now Dr. Gable, to hire them. As far as I can ascertain, neither of them has ever been competitive on the track, in the classroom, nor as a trainer. I’m now wondering what it is that makes these two guys so popular in the track and field circuit.” Mr. Frazier suggests, “they could have some dirt on Gable, and forced Gable to hire them.” Athena replies, “but, bail them out of jail, George? That’s really quite unusual.” Mr. Frazier then suggests, “maybe they have a landslide of dirt against Gable. Or, maybe it’s the fact that we won every gold medal last season, and they want to know how we did it.” Athena replies, “I think you hit the nail on the head, George.”

Knowing that the University’s track team had an awesome season last year, Eddie suggests, “McCutchen and Evans are probably spying on teams again. Everything they’ve ever done is underhanded and shady.”

Eddie then suggests to Mr. Frazier and Athena, “if I were you guys, I’d be checking all around that campus during practice, not just in the stadium. They can be sitting somewhere on campus with a parabolic microphone and binoculars, and gathering information. And, Lynn Berson has a camera that has a lens that can take a picture of a bird on a telephone pole a quarter-mile away.” Hoping what Eddie suggested is not true, Mr. Frazier replies, “you know. You might be right about that.” Athena tells Mr. Frazier, “we’ll get our police department to issue a restraining order against Todd McCutchen and Brad Evans. If our officers catch them on campus, we’ll have them taken in.” Now with a way to solve the potential problem, Mr. Frazier replies, “I like that idea!”

Taking in the conversation, Gina is quite surprised to hear what she is hearing. Gina naively asks the group, “are you guys saying that teams spy on each other?” Athena replies, “spying is only the tip of the iceberg. You can be sure that every team in the division knows your performance capabilities just as well as you and your coach do. And, at the administrative side of things, the powers at be do everything they can to give their teams an advantage and, at the same time, handing their competitors a disadvantage whenever possible. Some of what they do is underhanded and against the divisional rules. Occasionally, they get caught. But, many of them skirt the rules and fly under the radar, and have been doing so for years.”

Athena knows and understands the issue of skirting the rules all too well. Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Athena’s son, Darryl Stone, never attended formal classes when they ran for the University, but received a degree nevertheless. The news of Dean Grimsby’s involvement in a gambling ring certainly did not help the University’s image. But, since the time the universities in the division were audited several years ago, the University’s athletic program has been squeaky clean.

Tessa then informs Gina, “if you notice, on your performance chart, the temperature of the water is recorded along with your times. The pool temperature for a meet is supposed to be between 77 and 82 degrees. During a home meet, Dr. Mulkeen has the pool temperature set to give the team, as a whole, an advantage and, at the same time, giving the opponents a disadvantage if he can. You can be sure other teams do the same thing when the meet is held in their pool.” Quite surprised at what Tessa revealed, Gina admits, “I never knew that!”

Athena informs Gina, “at our University, in track and field, we do similar things to give our team an advantage. For example, there are three flags located at the end of the red zone.” Not familiar with track and field terminology, Gina interrupts, and asks, “what’s the red zone?” Athena continues, “the red zone is the area in the center of the track into where the discus, shot-put, hammer, and javelin are thrown. The flags

have been purposely placed in that location to give the field athletes an indication of the wind speed and direction. The United States flag is the heaviest of the three, and generally will only move in a strong wind. The University flag is the lightest of the three, and will move in a slight breeze. The State flag is somewhere in between. If our athletes see the flags are indicating a good tailwind, they'll take advantage of it if they can. If they see a strong headwind, they'll take their time stepping onto the launch pad, and wait for the wind to die down. The competing teams also have a perfect view of the flags, but honestly, none of the other teams have ever figured it out as far as I know."

Eddie suddenly blurts out, "Tessa can't swim in cold water." Tessa rebuts, "yes, I can!" Eddie replies, "no, you can't. That's part of the reason I beat you in the ocean by a whole thirty yards. The water was in the lower seventies." Now beginning to think that Eddie might just know what he is talking about, Tessa exclaims, "how long have you known this?" Eddie replies, "about three minutes."

Now intrigued, Athena asks Eddie, "please share with us how you came to that conclusion." Eddie replies, "I had no idea that, in a swimming meet, the pool temperature has to be between 77 and 82 degrees. The ocean around here is in the lower seventies. Today, the pool temperature is a little cooler, since all last week was on the cloudy side. The last three years, when Tessa beat me, if I remember correctly, it was really hot out here. So, the pool temperature was probably in the lower to mid eighties." Athena responds, "this comes right back to Kathy's master's thesis." Not recalling the details of Kathy's thesis, Tessa asks, "what's Kathy's thesis about?" Eddie yells out, "hey, Kathy! Come here for a second."

Kathy walks over, asking, "what's up?" Eddie tells Kathy, "tell Tessa about your thesis." Kathy replies, "my thesis title is, 'Environmental Factors in Exercise Tolerance and its Effect on Reactive Deconditioning Syndromes in Well Conditioned Athletes'. It was about how environmental factors affect performance. Like, if you always run when the temperature is 72 degrees, your performance will be great when it's 72 degrees outside, but will pretty much suck when it's 60 degrees or 90 degrees." Tessa and Gina listen carefully as Kathy goes on and describes her research in detail.

Once Kathy has finished summarizing her thesis material, Eddie tells Tessa and Gina, "if you want to improve your performance, you should be swimming in 60-degree water, 90-degree water, in the ocean, and in a pool. If you train in extreme conditions, the body adapts, and will perform better in all conditions. Me and Kathy don't even turn our air conditioner on at home anymore because the heat doesn't bother us." Eddie then specifically tells Gina, "then, when the opposing coach adjusts

the pool temperature to give his team an advantage, it won't matter to you." Gina reveals, "I never knew all this stuff! Everything sounds a whole lot more complicated than train hard and do your best at the meet."

Hearing Eddie's and Kathy's analysis, Athena suggests to Mr. Frazier, "perhaps we should investigate offering an Advanced Physical Conditioning II class where this material can be shared in the classroom. And, in the associated lab, we can put the theories to the test." Mr. Frazier replies, "that's a good idea. And, it would definitely give all of our athletic teams an advantage." Which, as both coaches know, translates to more money for the University.

Gina, on lifeguard duty today, has to go back to work. Gina tells the group, "thank you guys so much for all the information. I learned more today about how things really work than I ever thought." Athena replies, "no problem. I think we've all learned something here today. And, I'm so glad you could join us for lunch." Gina gets back to work, and it's now lunchtime for Laura, the head lifeguard.

After lunch, many in the group get into the water to cool off. Hanging out in the corner of the pool, Kathy asks Karen Corey, "what have you been up to, girl?" Karen explains, "I finished my Ph.D., but you already know that. The big news is I got a job teaching at the University." Kathy exclaims, "when did you find this out?" Karen replies, "I officially found out last week. But, Athena told me that I got the job a few weeks ago. But, she told me not to say anything." Kathy tells Karen, "congratulations!" Kathy could have easily found out that Karen was hired, for her father, Alexander Karakova, is still the athletic director at the University, and is the one who hired Karen.

Now wondering, Kathy asks Karen, "are you still going to be working with the University's team?" Karen replies, "yes. But, now it's official. I got massive amounts of class credit for working with the team, but now I'll get paid. And, I won't be working with Coach Johnson at the high school anymore." Kathy tells Karen, "Johnson is really going to miss you." Karen informs Kathy, "he said he has a few students that will make great student assistants. So, he's going that route next year."

Seeing that Johnson is following closely in Mr. Frazier's footsteps, Kathy smiles, and replies, "during the track dedication at the high school, I remember seeing at least a half dozen high school girls with stopwatches hanging around their necks." Karen explains, "over at the high school, being a student assistant with the track team seems to be a very prestigious and coveted position. Last year, there were about twenty girls who wanted the job. Coach Johnson picked seven of them."

Curious of Johnson's methodology in choosing the team assistants, Kathy asks, "how did Johnson pick the seven girls?" Karen replies, "he gave them a written test on track and field. Then, he made them time several events and take a few field measurements. Whoever came closest to Johnson's times and measurements got the job."

Now even more curious, Kathy asks, "what was on the written test?" Karen laughs and explains, "the test was ridiculously simple. You had to get all of the questions right to be considered. The test had a picture of all the equipment used in track and field, like a picture of a shot-put, discus, high jump apparatus, starting blocks, and so on in column A. And you had to pick the name of each item in column A from column B." Kathy giggles, telling Karen, "that sounds like something Johnson would do!"

Kathy asks, "how have things been with your mother?" Karen replies, "if you're talking about my former babysitter, well, we don't talk anymore. She has such a crappy attitude. I still talk to my dad, though. And, Aunt Jeannie is no longer my Aunt Jeannie. I call her mom now. So, I see my real mom during all the holidays and over the weekends a lot." Kathy smiles, telling Karen, "that's really nice. No one deserves all the shit your former babysitter gave you."

Mitchell, sitting back talking with Mark, asks, "how's that town over there where you, Eddie, and Bobby B. live?" Mark replies, "it's kind of quiet, and it will probably stay that way. All the homes are on two to three acres, so you're not right on top of your neighbor, which is really nice." Mitchell reveals, "Amber wants to move." Mark asks, "why?" Mitchell explains, "we live two towns over. She feels like we're out of the action. Everyone else pretty much lives close together." Making the solution sound easy, Mark replies, "so, move."

Mitchell mentions, "Johnson and Braden live in the same neighborhood. They say they like it there." Mark informs Mitchell, "Johnson bought that house because he could walk to the high school if he wanted to. It's only a half-mile away. That's really a nice neighborhood." Mitchell replies, "Amber wants to move in closer. I agree with her. It's probably best."

Mark suggests to Mitchell, "there are a couple of vacant lots in the town where I live. I've bought a few of them. So has Eddie. If you want one of them, I'm sure we can arrange something. And, I can custom build something for you. If you stay closer to the South end, near the high school, you'll be close to the train station." Mitchell replies, "Amber and I are going to start looking around next weekend." Mark informs Mitchell, "you've been in Johnson's and Braden's houses. Their houses have been completely remodeled. So, if you buy a house in their neighborhood, you're probably want to update everything. Some of those houses were

built back in the 1950s. And, they're built really well." Mitchell replies, "that's a good point."

Mitchell tells Mark, "I guess I should get moving on this and put my house up for sale." Mark asks, "why sell it? Just buy what you want, and rent out the one you're living in now." Mitchell, who was always the most intelligent one in the group, replies, "yeah. That's right! We don't have to wait for our house to sell in order to move." Mitchell, now more convinced that moving will be easier than he thought, plans to get the ball rolling.

Later in the afternoon, off in a corner of the pool, Eddie and Athena are discussing financial issues, specifically the stock market and money. Athena still cannot figure out how Eddie's stock market picks always return an enormous profit within three to six months. Neither can Athena's husband, Mike, who is supposedly a financial expert.

With many questions, Athena asks Eddie, "may I ask why you don't hold stocks for the long term?" Eddie explains, "well, I still own two utility stocks that return a nice dividend. But, to answer your question, just because I have a piece of paper that says I own a stock, that doesn't mean I really own anything. That company could be gone tomorrow, and the stock will be worthless. Stocks, and the bills you have in your wallet, really have no value at all. I take some of the money I earn in the stock market, and turn it into a tangible asset."

Athena asks, "how is it that you can say the bills in my wallet have no value?" Eddie replies, "a dollar bill is currency, not money. Gold is real money. If the whole world falls apart tomorrow, and all currencies fail, what's left standing? It will be gold, silver, real estate, and anything else tangible. I mean, look what happened during the great depression. The great depression affected what the Wall Street guys call 'financial instruments'. The farmer out West who had no debt wasn't really affected by the depression. He still ate well, and made a living. In any economy, there's always a demand for food. So, a farm is a tangible asset. A stock certificate is not. They can print dollar bills, as many as they want. They can't print real estate. They can't print gold. And, they certainly can't print food. And, when it comes to debt, the universal law is 'what can't be paid, won't be paid'. But, no one ever wants to talk about that." Athena agrees, telling Eddie, "that's certainly one subject no one ever touches on, certainly not in any classes given at the University."

Now curious, Athena asks Eddie, "what do you think the dollar is backed by?" Eddie explains, "everyone says the dollar is backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government. That's bullshit. The dollar is backed by the United States military." Athena agrees, telling Eddie, "that's a good point. You'll never hear that espoused in a finance class." Eddie replies, "that's because the government doesn't want

anyone to know what really backs the dollar.” Athena observes, “it’s no surprise, then, why we spend so much on our military.” Eddie replies, “exactly.” Eddie then goes on, explaining, “when the dollar was backed by gold and we had silver coins, that was money, not currency. Now, it’s backed by nothing tangible, other than the threat of physical force.”

Eddie then laughs, telling Athena, “you know, the dollar really is backed by something. It’s a metal. It’s called Erodium. Erodium is a metal that erodes away over time. If you put ten ounces of Erodium in a safe, lock it up, and come back five years later, you’ll only find eight ounces of Erodium.” Athena laughs, and replies, “that’s usually called inflation.”

Eddie, who has been studying the financial system for years, mentions, “that’s another interesting subject. The government needs a small amount of inflation to keep their currency engine going.” Eddie then asks Athena, “what happens when the inflation rate is higher than the interest rate?” Knowing the answer quite well, Athena replies, “the entire financial system will eventually fall off a cliff. Everything will be in turmoil. And, I might add, anyone who has the ability would convert their cash to tangible assets.” Eddie points out, “why wait until the disaster strikes? Once the rush comes to get into tangible assets, the price of the asset will skyrocket.” A light goes off in Athena’s head, who finally understands where Eddie is coming from.

As the afternoon winds down, many in the group head home. A few who don’t have kids that are falling asleep, head to the pizzeria. On their way home, Kathy mentions to Eddie, “it’s kind of nice that everything went smoothly today.” Eddie replies, “hopefully, all the crazy people are gone for good. But, there are a few more out there. They’ll be more of Johnson’s and Mr. Frazier’s problem.” Kathy asks, “really? Like who?” Eddie replies, “well, there’s Mr. O’Brien, Mr. Harrison, Mr. Ryan, McCrutchen’s itty bitty little brother Jeff, and now this Larry Gable guy. And, that’s just to start.” Pulling into the driveway, Kathy tells Eddie, “I think we might have an evening together. Eddie, Junior fell asleep.” Trying not to wake up his son, Eddie carries him inside, and puts Eddie, Jr. to bed.

Later that night, Johnson is at home with Barbara. Barbara receives a call from Wendy, who asks her, “hey, do you guys want to come over and join us at our pool for a while?” Barbara replies, “we’d love to. But, we may not be able to stay too long since it’s getting close to George’s bedtime.” Wendy tells Barbara, “we’re in the back yard. The gate is open. Just come on back.” Johnson and Barbara walk around the block, and walk into the Braden’s back yard.

Braden tells Johnson, “take a look at Hunter. He was in the pool all day at the park. And now, he’s gonna stay in the pool all night.” Johnson replies, “maybe not. He sees George, and now he’s getting out.” Braden figures, “they’ll play for a while, and then he’ll be back in the water.” Johnson suggests, “that’s because, if he stops, he’ll fall asleep.”

As Hunter and George play with toys, the two couples take a seat at a poolside table. Johnson comments, “it looks a lot better around here with the Chuckie’s house gone.” Wendy quickly replies, “yeah. I’d say so.” Braden informs Johnson and Barbara, “I’m gonna buy the Chuckie’s house. It’s going up for sale on the courthouse steps next month, and Mr. Davies is gonna be doing the auction. Ain’t nobody gonna out bid me.”

Barbara asks Braden, “what are you going to do with the property?” Braden replies, “I’m gonna remove the driveway, the walkway, the slab, and let the lot return to its natural condition.” Barbara replies, “wow! That is going to look really nice.” Johnson mentions, “I hear Mark is going to demolish Dave’s house and going to build a wall.” Braden replies, “it’s gonna look real good. Wendy is gonna have a really nice garden next year.”

Johnson asks Braden, “why are you buying all these houses and not doing anything with them?” Braden replies, “I’m glad you asked. I got a plan, bro.” Wendy interjects, “and, it’s a good plan, too.” Barbara tells Braden, “out with it. I really want to hear this.” Braden explains, “you guys know how quiet and peaceful it is up there where Eddie and those guys live. Well, I was thinking that, whenever a house comes up for sale around here, I can buy it, knock it down, and let the property go back to its natural condition. Then, we can have a quiet neighborhood in the woods right here in the town.” Barbara looks at her husband, and tells him, “that would really look nice.” Johnson replies, “and, it would really make this neighborhood an exclusive area.”

Braden further explains, “there are 75 houses in this neighborhood. Most of them are on a half acre. Right now, there are two houses for sale. So, I was thinking about taking some of the money I made in the stock market, and buying houses around here.” Barbara quickly suggests, “we can help, and buy some of the houses, too.” Braden replies, “that would be a big help.” Wendy adds, “I really like this area. It’s so close to everything. It would be a lot nicer if there were more trees and it was more natural.” Barbara energetically announces, “we’re in!” So, Braden’s plan of eliminating three-quarters of the homes in his neighborhood is put into motion.

Once Mitchell and Amber get home, Mitchell asks, “do you want to go out for a run?” Amber replies, “yes and no.” Mitchell asks, “what part is yes?” Amber replies, “I want to go out for a run, but not out on the road.”

Mitchell asks, “what part is no?” Amber replies, “if I’m going to cover any distance, I’ll have to fight the traffic. It’s Saturday evening, when all the drunks are out on the road. And, I really don’t feel like running in the sand at the beach or on a track somewhere.” Mitchell replies, “I can get that.”

Mitchell suggests, “we can always take the portal to somewhere at a different time.” Amber replies, “I know. But, I just want to walk out of my front door, and run. That’s not too easy to do around here. And, besides, I really want to move. I don’t like it here anymore. All of our friends live where we grew up.” Beating around the bush, Amber finally got to the subject that she wants to discuss with her husband.

Mitchell suggests, “so, let’s move. We can start looking for something tomorrow.” All excited at hearing her husband’s openness to moving, Amber exclaims, “how about now? Let’s see what’s for sale!” Mitchell logically asks, “where do you want to move to?” With no shortage of energetic words, Amber replies, “I want to live in the town behind the high school. Eddie and Kathy, Mark and Paula, Bobby B. and Erika all live there. And, Axel and Wendy, and Eric and Barbara all live right across the main road. I really want to live near our friends!” Mitchell was hoping that was the case, and that Amber did not change her mind.

Mitchell, realizing that he has to get this project moving, tells Amber, “let me call Mark.” Amber asks, “why call Mark?” Mitchell explains, “I talked to Mark earlier today. He said he owns a couple of vacant lots in the town behind the high school, and so does Eddie.” Amber exclaims, “yeah! That’s the ticket! Call Mark now!” Mitchell calls Mark, who is glad to give Mitchell the addresses of the properties he owns, Eddie owns, and Bobby B. owns.

After a fifteen-minute conversation, Mitchell hangs up the phone, and tells Amber, “between Mark, Eddie, and Bobby B., they own eleven properties in that town. I wrote down the addresses.” All excited, Amber grabs the list, gets out a map of the area, marking where the properties are. Once she is finished marking the location of each property on the map, Amber tells Mitchell, “okay. We’re going to look at them.” Mitchell asks, “now?” Amber smiles, and replies, “yeah. Like right now.” Mitchell and Amber head out the door, in search of their next home.

Mark and Paula, after putting Mark, Jr. and Dawn to bed, relax outside by their pool. Paula mentions to Mark, “there’s definitely something up with Erika.” Mark asks, “how do you know?” Paula explains, “she’s been really quiet today.” Mark confesses, “wow! I didn’t even notice.” Paula replies, “she said a little bit to Braden and Athena, talking about police work. But, most of the afternoon, she just sat at a table, staring out into space.” Mark suggests, “maybe she had a long week at work.” Paula

replies, “nope. My superpowers are telling me otherwise.” Mark tells Paula, “I guess we’ll find out soon enough.”

Paula asks, “what did Mitchell want when he called?” Mark explains, “he wants to move. He and Amber are getting tired of living far away from everyone. I gave him the addresses of the properties that Eddie, Bobby B., and we own. He’s going to look at them sometime.” Paula asks, “why did they move all the way over there, anyway?” Mark replies, “I don’t really know. I think it was because he had a straight shot to the train station.” Paula mentions, “it will be really nice having them live closer.”

Paula stretches and yawns, and tells Mark, “it’s been a long day.” Mark replies, “it’s been a long year, too. We did a lot this year.” Paula optimistically mentions, “hopefully, next year, we can have a little more of a normal life.” Mark replies, “yeah. But, you know that ain’t happening. Nothing ever goes as planned.” Paula yawns again, and tells Mark, “I want to go to bed.” Paula and Mark head inside, calling it a day.

Returning from the county pool, Bobby B. and Erika sit outside relaxing by their poolside. Bobby B. tells Erika, “you’ve been really quiet today.” Erika replies, “I know.” Bobby B. asks, “any reason why?” Erika replies, “I think I’m pregnant.” Bobby B. smiles, and exclaims, “really? When did you find this out?” Erika replies, “I figured it out when we were at the pool. I’m a week late. I’ve never been late in my life.” Bobby B. quickly suggests, “let’s go to the drug store and get a pregnancy test.” Suddenly energetic, Erika replies, “oh, yeah! We can do that!” Bobby B. and Erika head out, with Erika driving. Since Erika is a police officer, she can more easily get away with breaking the speed limit than the average Joe on the street.

When they return home, Erika makes a beeline to the bathroom. Bobby B. stands outside the door, asking, “well? What did it say?” Erika replies, “nothing yet.” Ten seconds later, Bobby B. impatiently asks, “anything yet?” Erika replies, “no. I’ll let you know.” Bobby B. paces the hallway, and rushes to the door when he hears the toilet flush. Erika opens the door, announcing, “we’re having a baby!” Bobby B. gives Erika a big hug, and exclaims, “awesome!”

Bobby B. energetically suggests, “we can invite our parents out to eat tomorrow, and tell them! And, then we can go shopping for baby things. And, what else? We have a lot of stuff to do!” Erika suggests, “how about we just go out with our parents to eat tomorrow. We have a lot of time to get everything else done. It’s not like I’m delivering the baby tomorrow.” Quickly realizing he was jumping the gun, Bobby B. replies, “oh, yeah. That’s right.” Bobby B. and Erika call it a night and head to bed, not likely to fall asleep very quickly in their wired state.

Later that night, after Eddie, Jr. goes to bed, Eddie and Kathy go outside in their pool for a late evening swim. Looking up into the sky, Kathy tells Eddie, “there’s my star.” Knowing exactly where Katarina’s star is, Eddie replies, “it’s very bright tonight.” Kathy puts her legs around Eddie’s hips as he moves around the pool. Kathy tells Eddie, “our son needs his own star.” Eddie replies, “we’ll find one for him.” Kathy closes her eyes, puts her head on Eddie’s shoulder and tells him, “I love you.” Eddie whispers in Kathy’s ear, “I love you.”