

Eddie, The Ten Year Reunion

Chapter Eight Summer Begins

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Saturday morning, on the Summer Solstice, Braden is out cutting his lawn in the morning, as he usually does. Hoping to get his yard work done before lunch, Braden plans to spend the afternoon in his back yard, enjoying his pool with his family. With only hardscape, plants, and no grass in the back yard to cut, Braden's Saturday yard work takes minimal effort. Braden put forth an extensive effort to plan his yard to be low maintenance. Braden often cuts his lawn twice a week, and has the best looking yard in the neighborhood.

When he is nearly finished cutting his lawn, Braden puts his hands on his hips for a moment, and stares across the street as Chuckie's house suddenly catches fire. With only a few more rows to go, Braden continues cutting his lawn, stopping every so often to watch as the fire begins to spread. Looking across the street, Braden sees a few people running out of the burning house, and hiding out in the bushes two houses down from Chuckie's house. Exactly who ran out of Chuckie's house did not escape Braden's notice.

A few minutes later, Chuckie, who was notified on his cell phone while he was on his way to work that his house is burning, drives up. Chuckie gets out of his car, and yells out, "my house! My house! It's on fire!" Braden, who just finished cutting his lawn, turns off his lawnmower, and yells back, "I can see that! From where I'm standing, it looks like it's burning real good, too! Your ass ought to have a barbecue." Chuckie's house, now engulfed in flames, is a total loss by any standard. Braden, standing with his arms crossed, watches as Chuckie's house burns to the ground.

Chuckie screams out to Braden, "didn't you call the fire department?" Braden replies, "no. not yet." Chuckie screams back, "why not? My house is burning down!" Fabricating an excuse, Braden replies, "because Wendy

is on the phone, talking to someone. I didn't want to interrupt her." Chuckie runs to a neighbor's house, frantically banging on the door, where no one immediately answers. Chuckie runs over to the next house, banging on the door, as Braden thinks to himself that he never saw Chuckie run that fast. Chuckie, who is a bit stressed, did not even think that he could use his cell phone to call the fire department.

Braden puts his lawnmower away, and moves on to blowing the lawn debris off the hard surfaces. Occasionally glancing over at Chuckie's house, Braden watches as the flames take more control of the structure. By now, many of the neighbors are in their driveways, watching as Chuckie's house burns to the ground.

Hearing sirens, Wendy walks outside just as a fire truck drives up. Braden tells Wendy, "the Chuckie's house is burning down." Wendy looks across the street, and sarcastically replies, "that's just too bad. We should send him a condolence card." Braden informs Wendy, "the Chuckie is running up and down the street, banging on everyone's door." Seeing Chuckie run back to his house, Wendy replies, "here he comes. Wow! He's really going crazy." Braden comments, "there ain't nothing new about that. His fat ass has always been crazy."

Braden pulls out two yard chairs out of the garage, setting them up in the driveway. Wendy walks around the front yard, and straightens up her engraved mirrored markers designating the plant species. She then takes a seat with her husband, as they sit and watch the action. The fire department lays out two hoses, preparing to put out the fire.

Braden's neighbor, Dave, walks over, and asks Braden, "what's going on?" Braden cheerfully replies, "I don't know. I was just out here cutting my lawn, and that house just started burning down." Dave asks Braden, "does anybody live there?" Braden replies, "yeah. Some guy named Chuckie." Dave comments, "I never see anyone over there. I thought that house was abandoned." Chuckie is very secretive, rarely coming out of his house, except to go to work.

As they walk out to the sidewalk to watch the fire, Dave casually mentions to Braden, "by the way, I got transferred, so I'll be putting my house up for sale. If you know anyone who might be interested, please let me or Maureen know." Braden asks, "how much are you asking for it?" Dave throws out a reasonable price, and Braden replies, "I'll take it." Dave asks, "are you serious?" Braden replies, "as serious as that house across the street burning down." Blind sided by Braden's offer, Dave tells Braden, "I don't even know how we begin." Braden advises Dave, "we'll go down to Davies and Rice, and they'll take care of everything. You won't have to worry about a thing." Dave walks home, and starts his Saturday yard work, after which he will begin packing.

Hunter walks outside and, seeing the flames, points out the obvious, announcing, “boogie man’s house is burning down!” Wendy tells her son, “that’s right. Now, the boogie man has to move far, far away.” Hunter asks, “how far away?” Wendy replies, “maybe the boogie man will have to move all the way to China.” Hunter exclaims, “good! I don’t want no boogie man living here no more. The boogie man is really scary.” Braden tells his son, “give me a high-five!” Hunter and Braden exchange a solid high-five, both glad that the boogie man who lives across the street will no longer be a problem.

Wendy asks Hunter, “did you want to eat lunch now and then go swimming?” Hunter replies, “no! I want to watch the boogie man’s house burn down.” Braden laughs, and tells Wendy, “that’s the first time I ever heard him say ‘no’ to going swimming!” Hunter comments, “I like the boogie man’s house burning down.” Braden laughs, and replies, “me too.” Wendy also replies, “yeah. That makes three of us.” Hunter jumps up and down clapping, glad to see that Chuckie’s house will soon be gone. Considering all the trouble Chuckie has caused for Braden and his family, little sympathy can be found for Chuckie in the Braden household.

All of a sudden, the fire captain yells out, “get back! Everyone, get back!” The firemen all rush to the street, where they are informed by their captain that the second story just shifted, and is about to collapse. Fortunately, all fire fighters are accounted for. As predicted, the house partially collapses, with part of the roof now threatening to land in the front yard. The fire gains control over the structure, setting the firefighters back in their attempt to extinguish the fire. The firefighters get back to work, attempting to prevent the fire from spreading to neighboring homes.

A police car pulls up, and parks in front of Braden’s house. Getting out of the car, Officer Erika Bradshaw walks up to greet Wendy and Braden. Braden tells Hunter, “go give Erika a high-five.” Hunter runs up to Erika, giving her a high-five, exclaiming, “the boogie man’s house is burning down!” Erika replies, “oooooh, that’s just too bad. Maybe I can put the boogie man in jail for you.” Hunter jumps up and down clapping, glad to hear that Chuckie might go to jail.

Wendy asks Erika, “how come you’re working today?” Erika replies, “I work every other weekend. Today’s my day. But, I have Wednesday and Thursday off this week.” Braden asks Erika, “did you come to watch the fire?” Erika explains, “I got the call a few minutes ago. That house is on our watch list. Captain Hayes is on his way, and the paramedics are on their way too. We strongly suspect there’s a drug lab in that house so, when the fire is out, we’ll see what we can find.”

Wendy asks, “why the paramedics?” Erika replies, “it’s precautionary. If there’s a drug lab in that house, it could explode.” Braden exclaims, “what do you mean, ‘if’? That’s the Chuckie’s house! There’s all kinds of drugs in there. He’s making it, baking it, smoking it, and toking it!” Erika laughs, and goes over to talk to the fire captain to warn him of the potential hazards. Braden, listening to his radios over the last several months, knows exactly what is inside Chuckie’s house. While Erika is speaking with the paramedics, Braden goes inside for a moment.

When Braden returns, Braden tells Erika, “it looks like the Chuckie’s house is burning down real good.” Erika replies, “good. It couldn’t have happened to a nicer person.” It’s no secret where Erika stands on Chuckie’s house burning down. Suddenly, a loud explosion comes from Chuckie’s house, causing the rest of the upper story of the structure to collapse. Glad to see the boogie man’s house almost gone, Hunter applauds, enjoying the show. Erika comments, “well, there goes the drug lab. I hope there’s still enough evidence to bust him.”

Braden hands Erika a large envelope, and tells her, “here’s a present for you.” Erika asks, “what’s this?” Braden replies, “it’s the Chuckie’s drug organizational chart. And, I got some good pictures in there too of him making his drops at the home improvement store. I don’t need this anymore. You can have it so you can bust his ass.” Erika replies, “good. This will be more evidence to put him away.” Erika puts the envelope in her police car, and will submit Braden’s work as evidence when the time comes.

Next to drive up at the scene is Captain Richard Hayes, who asks Erika, “what do we got so far?” Erika replies, “the residence caught fire. At this time, there is no known cause. Right before you drove up, there was a loud explosion. We’ve suspected for a while that there’s a drug lab inside that house. That’s probably what blew.” Knowing that it is Chuckie’s house that is burning, Captain Hayes responds, “it’s no secret what happens in that character’s house.” The problem has been that Chuckie’s operations have been very secretive. As a result, there was never enough evidence for the police to obtain a warrant to search Chuckie’s house.

Braden informs Captain Hayes and Erika, “when the house caught fire, two people ran outside. One of them was Andy Goldshit. The other was Terry Haynes.” Captain Hayes raises his eyebrows, and replies, “really? There’s a warrant out for both of them.” Braden whispers to Captain Hayes and Erika, “they’re both hiding out in the bushes two houses down on the side yard.” With his back to Haynes and Goldstein’s temporary hideout, Captain Hayes asks Braden, “do you know exactly where they are?” With a clear view to the house, Braden replies, “yes, sir. And, they’re still there. They ain’t got nowhere to go.”

Captain Hayes tells Erika, "I'm going to get 302 and 340 over here, and we're taking those two characters in. I'm going to drive around the block, and make it look like I'm leaving. Meet me on TAC-5, and keep the volume low." Erika replies, "got it."

Braden asks Captain Hayes, "why do you need two backup units?" Captain Hayes replies, "this Goldstein character has a warrant out for his arrest. He's wanted for theft of firearms among a few other things. He's considered armed and dangerous. I can't just walk over there and arrest him." Hearing the news, Braden now suspects it is Goldstein who shot at his house a few months ago. Captain Hayes gets into his car, drives away, and radios for the two backup units. Erika stands by, awaiting her orders.

Across the street, the firefighters are getting the fire under control. Getting Chuckie under control, however, is another problem. One house over, sitting on the curb, Chuckie cries his heart out, watching his drug empire burn to the ground. Meanwhile, Haynes and Goldstein hide out down the street, afraid to get into public view with a clear police presence coming in and out of the area.

Erika gets a call on the radio from Captain Hayes, who instructs her to position her vehicle in a certain location farther down the street. Erika instructs Braden and his family to get inside of his house, and watch from the windows. Erika then gets into her police car, and drives down the street. Braden, knowing what is coming, gets a good view through his bulletproof garage windows.

Two police officers, 302 and 340, approach the home on foot from the other side of where Goldstein and Haynes are hiding out in the bushes. At the other end of the street, Erika sneaks into place on the side of Braden's brick wall. Erika, the fastest of the officers present today, will be ready to chase down anyone who attempts to make a run for it. Captain Hayes gives the signal, prompting 302 to approach Goldstein and Haynes from the back yard and 340 from the front yard. Both officers approach carefully with their guns drawn.

Having Goldstein and Haynes in plain view, 302 yells out, "freeze!" Goldstein and Haynes freeze, and are instructed by 340, "walk out of the bushes slowly with your hands up!" Goldstein and Haynes comply, and walk out of the bushes with their hands over their head. As the officers cautiously approach, Goldstein suddenly makes a run for it, but does not move very quickly after Eddie dislocated both of Goldstein's ankles many years ago. Goldstein is chased down by 340. Haynes is quickly apprehended by 302.

Aware that Goldstein made a run for it, Erika rushes out from behind the brick wall, intending to intercept Goldstein. Seeing Erika, Goldstein

abruptly changes direction running around the fire truck back in the direction from which he came. Suddenly caught off guard, 340 loses a lot of ground in the pursuit. Erika, never losing site of Goldstein, gains on Goldstein, comes up from behind, and takes him down hard. Goldstein lands face down on the road, slides a few feet, leaving part of his face on the pavement. Erika cuffs Goldstein, escorting him to the sidewalk where he is read his rights.

Captain Hayes drives up, helping to detain Goldstein and Haynes as the other officers, one by one, retrieve their vehicles. Seeing the condition of Goldstein's face, Captain Hayes radios for an ambulance. While 340 is retrieving his vehicle, Captain Hayes tells Erika and 302, "that was some good police work. Hopefully, we can put all three of these characters away by the end of the day." Captain Hayes is hoping to somehow get Chuckie, the third person, off the streets too.

Braden and Wendy come out of their home, glad to see Goldstein and Haynes have been apprehended. Chuckie runs up to Captain Hayes, pointing to Braden, exclaiming, "arrest him! Arrest him!" Quite annoyed at Chuckie, Captain Hayes asks, "under what charges?" Chuckie exclaims, "he didn't call the fire department! My house was burning down! Arrest him!" Braden laughs, and replies, "what are you talking about, junior? Those two clowns ran from your house! What were their asses hiding out in the bushes for instead of calling the fire department? And, besides, junior, you could have called the fire department from your cell phone!"

Not wanting to deal with Chuckie right now, Captain Hayes firmly instructs Chuckie, "I suggest you walk to the other side of the street and stay there. Otherwise, I'll arrest you for interfering with a police investigation." Not wanting to get arrested himself, Chuckie goes to the other side of the street, and watches as his house continues to burn to the ground.

Erika escorts Haynes to 302's patrol car. Haynes gets a bit crazy, and attempts to kick Erika multiple times, marginally contacting her once. Captain Hayes instructs 302, "go ahead and add assaulting an officer of the law to her charges." Haynes is placed in the cage, and transported to the police station. Goldstein, however, sits on the curb, handcuffed, with his face still bleeding, awaiting the ambulance.

Braden mentions to Wendy, "it looks like they almost got the fire out." Wendy replies, "yeah. Because there's nothing left to burn." Braden exclaims, "I see that! Hopefully, Chuckie's fat ass won't be around for our class reunion." Chuckie's house, totally burned to the ground, is a complete loss. Chuckie sits on the curb and weeps, knowing that he will have to start all over again.

Braden then informs Wendy, “by the way, we’re buying Dave’s house.” Not expecting to hear that they are buying a house today, Wendy exclaims, “what? When did this come about?” Braden replies, “Dave mentioned he’s getting transferred, and he’s gotta sell his house. I told him I’ll buy it. Then, we can get Mark to knock it down, extend our wall, and you can have your vegetable garden. And, we’ll get John to put in a sprinkler system so you don’t have to get out there every day and water everything. Oh yeah, and you’ll have a really good place to use your telescope, since it will be dark there.” Nearly speechless, Wendy exclaims, “that’s awesome!” Chuckie and Goldstein mistakenly take Wendy’s jubilation to be a celebration that Chuckie’s house has been destroyed.

The ambulance arrives, and Goldstein is escorted by Erika to the paramedics. Goldstein is loaded into the ambulance, will be treated at the hospital, and then transported to jail. Erika tells the paramedics, “don’t give him any pain killers. He’s a drug distributor. So, let him suffer.” The paramedic gives Erika a thumbs up, shuts the door, and the ambulance drives off.

A short time later, the fire department finishes their job of putting out the fire, and drives away. Captain Hayes tells Erika, “go ahead and put crime scene tape around what’s left of that house. We’ll get the detectives out here this afternoon and go over that place with a fine-toothed comb before anyone gets a chance to tamper with the evidence.” Erika replies, “got it,” and gets to work cording off Chuckie’s house.

Realizing his house is now a crime scene, Chuckie runs over to Captain Hayes, and asks, “how come she’s making my house a crime scene?” Bending the truth a bit, Captain Hayes replies, “houses do not catch on fire for no reason. It could be arson. The investigators will be here shortly and make that determination. Until then, no one, and I repeat, no one is to enter the property.” Now very worried, Chuckie paces back and forth in the street, hoping that any incriminating evidence was burned up in the fire.

With the action winding down, Braden, Wendy, and Hunter go inside and plan lunch. To celebrate the boogie man now having to move, Wendy orders pizza that will be delivered, and eaten out on the back patio. Hunter, for one, is glad to see that the boogie man now has to move far, far away. But, more important at the moment, Hunter is very happy to get pizza.

Over the last few months, Wendy, who is well-versed in astronomy, has been working on a few math problems. Wendy, who is far smarter than average, calculated what the inclination and declination of the sun would be on the Summer solstice at a certain time in the morning. Using this information, Wendy accurately aimed her engraved mirrored plant

markers to reflect light at a certain point on Chuckie's house when the sun is at a precise point in the sky. With 35 mirrors in the front yard, and a few in the back yard, all aimed at the same location, Chuckie's house got far too hot in that one spot, causing a fire to start. The rest is history.

Later that evening, Chuckie drives up to his house and parks in his driveway, hoping to salvage whatever he can. Seeing that the crime scene tape has been removed, Chuckie concludes that he is in the clear. Wading through the remains of his house, Chuckie finds nothing that is of any value. The fire has destroyed everything. And, that which the fire did not destroy was crushed by the structure when it collapsed. Ready to start all over again, Chuckie heads back to his car, sobbing on his way.

Braden, relaxing in his back yard, heard Chuckie drive up, and tips off the police department. Erika Bradshaw drives up in her police car, blocking Chuckie's car, preventing him from leaving. Erika intercepts Chuckie, announcing, "Charles Black, you are under arrest for the manufacture of controlled substances and drug trafficking. Please place your hands behind your head." Chuckie makes a run for it, somehow thinking he can outrun Erika. But, Chuckie is about as slow and nimble as a turtle laying on its back.

Erika chases Chuckie down, taking him down in less than ten yards. Landing hard on the pavement, Chuckie adds more tears to his sobbing, clearly understanding where his future lies. Erika cuffs Chuckie, and drags him back to her police car. From across the street, Braden yells out to Erika, "hey! Thanks for taking out the trash!" Erika yells back, "no problem!" Erika arrests Chuckie again, and reads him his rights.

Chuckie, however, is not quite that naive. Chuckie sees that Braden, Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., Johnson, and Mitchell are quite well off. Chuckie exclaims, "I'm reporting you people to the IRS! You guys must be doing something illegal!" Then, in what seems to Erika and Braden to be an admission of his wrongdoings, Chuckie yells out, "you're taking down your competition! That's it! I know exactly what you guys are doing!" Braden yells out from across the street, "that sounds like a confession to me!" Braden, hoping not to see Chuckie for a long time, watches, as Erika drives Chuckie away to the county jail.

Every other week there seems to be a pool party or get together at someone's house. Today, the party is at Eddie and Kathy's house, where friends who have known each other for years get together. Eddie and Kathy spend the early morning getting the house ready for their guests. Eddie, Jr. has commandeered the task of checking the skimmers for frogs and other unfortunate creatures who decided to make the pool their home. Unlike Kathy, Eddie, Jr. is somewhat disappointed when he does not find a frog.

By mid morning, Eddie, Kathy, and a few others, are relaxing, sitting at a poolside table. Braden and Wendy walk through the gate with Hunter, joining the group. With a big smile on his face that cannot be concealed, Hunter runs up and announces to everyone, “the boogie man’s house burned down!” Eddie, Jr. gives Hunter a high-five, and asks, “does that mean the boogie man moved away?” Hunter exclaims, “yeah! No more boogie man!” But, everyone in the tribe got the news that Chuckie’s house burned down shortly after the incident.

Eddie mentions to those sitting around, “I guess that means the Chuckie won’t be at the reunion.” Mark replies, “that’s just too bad. My heart sobs.” Paula laughs, telling Mark, “yeah, right. Your heart only sobs because you won’t get to mess with him. Now, you’ll have to find someone else to mess with at the reunion.” Mark replies, “I’m totally busted!”

Eddie asks Braden, “did they ever figure out how the fire started?” Braden replies, “from what I hear, they say it started in a wall upstairs. But, I told the fire department that when they showed up. They say it was probably an electrical fire.” Wendy, who is the only one on Earth who knows exactly how the fire started, comments, “that sounds plausible to me.” Braden energetically exclaims, “I will get to go home tonight in peace, and not find my home was shot at, my garbage can on fire, or the word ‘ass’ burned into my lawn!” Wendy exclaims, “and, we’ll all sleep better!”

Eddie, Jr. boasts to Hunter, Mark, Jr., and Dawn, “I’m going to school soon!” Dawn asks, “why?” Eddie, Jr. confidently replies, “so I can learn how to fix cars.” Dawn informs her friends, “when I’m old enough to go to school, I’m going to learn how to grow flowers.” Mark, Jr. tells his sister, “no, you’re not. You don’t learn how to grow flowers in school. Flowers grow all by themselves.” Hunter informs the group of preschoolers, “when I go to school, I’m going to learn how to shoot a gun.” Dawn suggests, “then, you can shoot the boogie man.” Hunter reminds Dawn, “Miss Erika put the boogie man in jail for a long time.”

While on the subject of school, Eddie, Jr. reminds his mother, “mom, I’m going to need my own tool box when I go to school.” Hearing the conversation, Eddie disappears for a moment, leaving Kathy to explain to Eddie, Jr. why he will not need a tool box when he enters kindergarten. Kathy replies, “you won’t need a toolbox. You’ll need a pencil and crayons.” Eddie, Jr. insists, “but, I want to learn how to fix cars.” Kathy tells her son, “daddy can teach you how to do that. They don’t teach auto repair in kindergarten.” Eddie, Jr., hoping that he would learn to be a mechanic in kindergarten, has not given up hope that auto repair is something he will learn.

Eddie returns, handing Eddie, Jr. a shop manual for Eddie's 1969 MGB that he purchased many years ago when he was still in high school. Eddie tells his son, "here's an auto repair manual. Open the book, and take a look inside." Opening the manual, Eddie, Jr. whines, "there's not a lot of pictures." Eddie replies, "that's right. There are a lot more words than pictures. You have to learn how to read. You're going to school so you can learn to read all the words in the repair manual. If you can't read, you won't be able to follow the instructions to fix a car." Eddie, Jr. thumbs through the manual, realizing that an automobile repair manual is a bit more complicated than *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*. Finally getting the message, Eddie, Jr. now has a goal - learn to read so he can learn how to fix cars.

Kathy tells Eddie, "well, that worked." Eddie replies, "yeah. But, now it's on to the next problem." Kathy asks, "what's the next problem?" Eddie explains, "when he gets to school, he's going to be asking the teacher, 'when am I going to learn how to read so I can fix cars?' But, at least it will be the teacher's problem." Kathy laughs, telling Eddie, "that kid has a one-track mind. He's definitely going to be a mechanic." Paula laughs, telling everyone, "I wonder how he got so interested in cars."

Arriving next is Darryl Stone and Angela Meadows, who walk through the gate together. Paula yells out, "hey! It's the Olympic gold medalist and the famous sportscaster!" Angela yells back, "that's us," then turns and kisses Darryl. Now knowing that there's a bit more going on between Angela and Darryl than originally thought, Paula exclaims, "it seems like you guys know each other!" Angela replies, "we do! We met again during the track dedication last Fall. We went out on our first date the day after the dedication." Kathy exclaims, "awesome!"

The first question Mitchell has for Stone is, "are you still running?" Stone replies, "not as much. It's funny. I met my goal, and that was it. So, I'm focusing a lot more on my drumming." Stone asks Mitchell, "how about you? Are you still running?" Mitchell replies, "I've been keeping up my training." Knowing Mitchell is not showing all his cards, Stone tells Mitchell, "I was there when you unofficially broke the record in the mile. That's more than keeping up your training." For the first time publicly, Mitchell confesses, "I'm after the 1,500-meter record. I'm going to do it." Stone, still a hippie of sorts, gives Mitchell a high-five, and replies, "more power to you!"

Angela tells Mitchell, "that must have been your most memorable run!" Not showing much emotion, Mitchell replies, "it was definitely high up on the list." Kathy exclaims, "yeah! At the top of his list!" Mitchell replies, "well, yeah." Mitchell, for some reason, is quite reserved, even when he wins. The reason is that Mitchell has won so much, so winning is no

longer special. Officially breaking the world record in the 1,500-meter run, however, would be special to Mitchell.

Angela asks Kathy, “what was your most memorable race?” Kathy replies, “without a doubt, it was my first 4 by 440-yard relay when I was in high school. Me, Eddie, Paula, and Mark were in the race, and we came in first place. And, I won my very own gold medal!” Angela asks, “do you still have it?” Kathy replies, “I do!” Angela asks, “can I see it?” Kathy tells Angela, “let me go and get it for you. I’ll be right back.” Kathy runs inside to get the first medal she won in track when she was a junior, which means so much to her.

Kathy returns with her medal, telling Angela, “our relay team was undefeated for two years.” Handing the medal to Angela, Kathy explains, “this was a really hard medal to win. It’s not because the race was hard, but because Mr. Crum, the principal, put so many roadblocks in our way. He wouldn’t let the women run on the team, even though the rules would allow it. Was that ever the fight of my life.” Paula laughs, and adds, “you have to admit, in retrospect, some of it was pretty funny.”

Angela admires Kathy’s medal, places it down on Kathy’s beach towel, and asks Paula, “what was funny about it?” Paula quickly answers, “Kathy threw the discus at Mr. Crum, and broke his leg.” Kathy laughs, and adds, “totally by accident, of course.” Finishing what she was saying, Paula continues, “so, Mr. Crum was running around like a madman for an entire year trying to figure out who threw the discus that hit him. He suspected that one of the guys did it. Then, Wendy asked Mr. Crum, ‘how do you know it wasn’t one of the girls?’ Mr. Crum told Wendy, ‘a girl couldn’t throw the discus twenty feet.’” Kathy tells Paula, “it’s funny how you remember that so well.” Paula replies, “seriously, girl. Who could forget that!”

Still always yanking on Paula’s chain every chance she gets, Kathy responds, “that wasn’t half as funny as your English paper in eleventh grade.” Paula replies, “no! Don’t even think about going there!” Angela tells Kathy, “I got to hear this one!” Angela’s sentiment is echoed by those around, prompting Paula to reply, “okay. I’ll tell it.” Paula would prefer to tell the story herself rather than hear Kathy’s version of it. But, Kathy will surely fill in the blanks if Paula leaves anything out.

Paula explains, “when we were juniors, we had an English term paper to write. It was at the end of the year. That entire year, the teacher seriously picked apart my punctuation. So, at the bottom of my five-page typewritten paper, I wrote, ‘Here’s a bunch of extra punctuation. Feel free to add it where necessary.’ And also, at the bottom of my paper, I drew a picture of a garbage can, and wrote under it, ‘please deposit any extra

punctuation here.” Paula would be happy to finish the story right where she did, but Kathy tells her, “tell them the rest!”

With no way out of finishing her story, Paula continues, “so, the teacher made an overhead slide of my paper, and the entire class joined in correcting my punctuation. I was so embarrassed! But, the good news is that the teacher gave me an A on my paper.” Hearing Paula’s story, Angela and the others around laugh. Kathy comments, “at least there’s no superfluous punctuation in your papers,” clearly emphasizing the word superfluous. Recalling Kathy is about to tell of the incident from chemistry class during their junior year, Paula tells Kathy, “don’t even go there, girl.” Kathy smiles, ready to tell the story again if the opportunity presents itself.

Telling her own story from English class, Angela explains, “when I was at the University, Dr. Hutchinson, the guy I had for freshman English, was telling the class, ‘in no language, will a double negative ever result in a negative construct. In every language, however, a double positive will always result in a positive construct.’ So, I yell out from the back of the room, ‘yeah, right.’ The class started laughing, because ‘yeah, right’ is a clearly negative construct derived from two positives. So, Dr. Hutchinson told me to see him after class.”

Laughing with the rest of the group, Paula asks, “so, what happened?” Angela replies, “he told me that, if I had any more outbursts like that, he’ll drop me from the class, and that I’d better be on my best behavior. I really wanted to tell him that was my best behavior.” Paula laughs, and comments, “he sounds like a real ass!” Kathy tells Angela, “after Barbara told us all about Dr. Hutchinson, we signed up for Dr. Thompson’s class instead.”

Barbara laughs, recalling her years at the University. Kathy asks, “what’s so funny?” Barbara replies, “I was thinking about one of my classes in exercise physiology.” Using one of Barbara’s own phrases, Kathy replies, “out with it, girl!”

Barbara explains, “in exercise physiology class, Dr. Moran was talking about contraindications to certain types of exercise. He used the phrase, ‘in the case of the patient with a history of sudden cardiac death.’ So, I asked the question, ‘if the patient has a history of sudden cardiac death, wouldn’t it be safe to assume that person is now dead, and that exercise would no longer be of any benefit?’ The class started cracking up, and so did Dr. Moran. Dr. Moran then clarified his statement and told the class that ‘sudden cardiac death’, in this case, refers to someone whose heart was restarted by CPR, a defibrillator, or by some other method.” Laughter again breaks out among the group. Kathy mentions to everyone, “I liked

Dr. Moran's classes. They were really interesting. And, he was my master's thesis advisor."

Angela asks Kathy, "what was your master's thesis about?" Kathy replies, "the title is, 'Environmental Factors in Exercise Tolerance and its Effect on Reactive Deconditioning Syndromes in Well Conditioned Athletes'. My research was about how environmental factors affect performance. I got the idea from Eddie. When Eddie tried out for the track team at the University, McCrutchin called Eddie's training sled a piece of shit. Eddie got really ticked off." Eddie laughs, and mentions, "I remember that." Kathy continues, "Eddie told McCrutchin that his problem is that, when he runs, the temperature has to be between 68 and 72 degrees, it has to be 50 percent humidity, and the wind can't be more than two miles per hour."

Remembering what he said years ago, Eddie interrupts Kathy and, embellishing a bit, exclaims, "that's the problem with you, McCrutchin! You won't run in the rain because you'll get wet! And, when it's snowing outside, you cuddle up in your little nice warm blankie. Then, when you get to a track meet, when it's 80 degrees, you pass out from heat exhaustion and have to be brought to the hospital! And, if it's 60 degrees outside, you stand out there shivering your ass off, looking for a heater! No wonder you suck, McCrutchin! You never win!" Mark comments, "and, he never did win." Johnson adds, "that's the truth." Paula sarcastically comments, "he won at losing."

Kathy then continues, "so, Eddie told McCrutchin that he should be dragging the training sled on the sand track in the heat, cold, rain, and snow. Now, here's the part that made me think of the thesis topic. Eddie told McCrutchin that, when it's hot outside, he should be wearing sweat pants. When it's cold outside, he should be running in shorts. In the snow, he should be running in bare feet. Eddie implied that McCrutchin needed to be toughened up. Then, Eddie called McCrutchin a pussy ass, and the whole team started snickering." Angela laughs, telling the group, "I really wish I were there to hear that!" Paula tells Angela, "we definitely had some interesting times running track."

Kathy asks Angela, "what was your master's thesis topic?" Angela replies, "well, it's kind of far fetched if you ask me. The title is, 'Universal Connectivity and the Coming Age of Instant Information.' I got the idea from a philosophy class that I took." Paula asks, "you got the idea from a philosophy class?" Angela replies, "I sure did. We watched a lecture one day in class, on a recorded video. The lecturer's name was Alan Watts. He talked about how, in the future, all the information in the world will eventually be at everyone's fingertips. He was really an interesting guy, and definitely way ahead of his time." Kathy remembers her trip to the future and that, in the year 2030, there was a business called *Eddie's Tire*

and Power Cell. Kathy, recalling that, somehow, Eddie, Jr. was working from home, tells Angela, “that really doesn’t sound too far fetched to me.”

Discussing her thesis, Angela explains, “in my thesis, I examined communication speed of news from 300 years ago to the present. I found that, mathematically, it was an exponential curve. There are a lot of variables, such as the distance the news has to travel, the importance of the news, the number of people spreading the news, the number of people intended to receive the news, and so on. So, according to my math, by about the year 2030, the exponential curve goes off the chart.” Recalling when she went to the future to watch a track meet in the year 2060, Kathy tells Angela, “I can definitely see that happening. I’m not so sure I would want to live in that age when that happens, though.”

Hoping to hear some more interesting stories, Angela asks, “what else went on that I never heard about?” Mark sits back with his feet up, and replies, “in ninth grade, Eddie taught the teacher what a barometer is.” Looking through the fence into the driveway, hoping the catering truck delivering the pizza has arrived, Eddie replies, “no! Not this one.” Kathy laughs, and tells Eddie, “you’re not getting out of telling this one, buddy!”

Not hearing this story, Paula tells Eddie, “do tell!” Reluctantly, Eddie explains, “I never paid too much attention in Earth Science class. And, neither did Mark, by the way. So, on the test, the question was something like, ‘Describe the function and use of a barometer.’ So, I wrote, ‘a barometer is an ingenious, yet useless, instrument that tells us what kind of weather we are having.’ Mr. Lambert, the teacher, drew a great big red ‘X’ through my answer, and took off ten points.” Mark laughs, knowing what is coming next.

Eddie continues, “Mr. Lambert asked if anyone had any questions about the test. So, I told him that I didn’t see what was wrong with my answer. So, he told me to read my answer to him. I read my answer, and he told me that my answer was something that he expected out of a third grader. So, I told him, ‘look at the barometer. It’s labeled, ‘Stormy - Rain - Change - Fair - Sunny’. So, I told him, a barometer is ingenious because some stupid mechanical dial on the wall can know exactly what is happening outside. And, I told him that a barometer is basically useless, because I can look outside, and see what kind of weather we are having. So, then I asked him, ‘how am I wrong?’ So, the whole class started laughing. We got into a big argument, and he finally gave up and gave me my ten points.”

Bobby B. walks up with Erika, and, hearing the laughter, Bobby B. asks, “what’s so funny?” Mark replies, “with the reunion coming up, we were just telling stories about when we were in high school and college.” Bobby B. asks, “any good ones?” Erika volunteers, telling the group, “I

have a few stories.” Knowing Erika’s stories are usually a bit on the deviant side, Bobby B. announces, “I claim no responsibility for what she is about to say.” Erika asks Bobby B., “how about the one about the sperm and egg?” Bobby B. smiles, and replies, “I already know this one. I’m out of here,” and jumps into the pool to cool off.

Kathy asks, “what’s this about a sperm and egg?” Erika explains, “at the University, even though I got a degree in Criminal Justice, I had to take biology classes, since forensics involve biology. In class, the professor asked, can anyone explain the biological and survival advantages of having one egg and multiple sperm versus one sperm and multiple eggs?” No one dared to answer the question, so the professor looked through the class roster, and announced, ‘Erika Gabriel, will you venture to answer my question?’ So, I told him, ‘sure, I can do that.’” Kathy comments, “I’ve not heard this one.”

Erika explains, “so, I answered his question, saying something like, ‘it’s genetic. In a human, the egg is ten-thousand times the size of a sperm. The eggs come from females, and the sperm come from males. During the ejaculation, there are 250,000 sperm. Sperm act just like men, since they come from men. So, just like men, sperm are not very good at directions. So, only a few sperm will make it to the egg purely by chance because none of them have any directional sense. And, the rest of them get lost, just like men when they’re driving.’” As those around the table laugh, Bobby B. yells out from the pool, “whatever she’s saying, I have nothing to do with it!”

Erika continues, “so, the professor told me, ‘that’s an interesting take on it. Suppose there were many eggs and only one sperm?’ So, I told him, ‘that’s easy. Since eggs come from females, they’ll all act like females. So, all the eggs would fight and argue with each other, except for maybe one egg. That lone egg would go and find the sperm while all the other eggs fight and kill each other.’ So, the professor told me that I had a very unique perspective. So, then one of the students yelled out, ‘what do you expect? She’s a Criminal Justice major.’ Then, the whole class started laughing.” As everyone is laughing, Kathy exclaims, “that’s really funny!”

Eddie jumps into the pool, joined by a few others. Mark mentions to Eddie, “that dodge ball competition in sixth grade really took the cake.” Braden exclaims, “that was really funny!” Johnson asks, “what? I never heard about that one.” Braden laughs, and tells Eddie, “you gotta tell them about that one! That was Chuckie’s first ass kicking!” Also not hearing the story, Bobby B. tells Eddie, “I haven’t heard this one either. Let’s hear it.”

Eddie explains, “in sixth grade, me, Mark, and Braden were in the same gym class. I think Gump might have been in that class too, but I’m

not sure.” Braden interjects, “yeah. Gump was in that class.” Eddie continues, “so, me and Mark were the team captains, and Mark ended up with the Chuckie on his team because the Chuckie was picked last.” Mark interjects, “lucky me.” Braden adds, “I was on Eddie’s team.”

Eddie continues, “so, I told Mark, ‘if it looks like I’m the last man standing, save the Chuckie for me, and don’t let him get hit.’ And, I told my team, ‘whatever you do, don’t take out the Chuckie.’” Johnson observes, “this sounds like a setup.” Mark replies, “yeah. It was. And, a really good one at that.” Eddie explains, “after a while, there was only me left on my team. On Mark’s team, it was Mark and the Chuckie.” Braden exclaims, “here it comes! I remember that! That was Chuckie’s first ass kicking.”

Continuing his story, Eddie explains, “so, I threw the ball at Mark, who pretended to catch it, but he dropped it intentionally. Mark steps off the court, looking back and smiling. So, it’s me against the Chuckie. Chuckie throws the ball at me, which bounced a few times before it gets to me. I pick up the ball, bounce it a few times, and stare down the Chuckie. I faked a throw once or twice, then I hurled the ball as hard as I could right at him. So, the Chuckie sees the ball coming right at him, and he ducks. But, since he ducked, the ball hit him in the head, and his head got smashed against the wall. So, the Chuckie got knocked out, and was laying on the floor.”

Braden exclaims, “I remember that! I thought that was the last time we were gonna see the Chuckie! I thought his ass was dead!” Eddie continues, “so, Mr. Harris threw cold water on the Chuckie’s face, and he finally comes to. And, a few of the guys helped him get to the nurse’s office.”

Mark mentions, “what Eddie didn’t say is that the Chuckie was bullying us in the lunchroom for two or three months before that. We kind of ignored him, but he was just becoming a bigger pain in the ass.” Eddie explains, adding, “there was that, and that time the Chuckie sat behind me in class when school first started that year. I went to sit down, and he hooked his foot around the leg of my chair, and pulled it out from under me. I landed on the floor, and hit my head on his desk. When I got up, I told the Chuckie, ‘you’re dead meat. Someday, somewhere, I’m going to kick your ass. I don’t know when, but it’s coming.’ But, the bullying never stopped. We just ignored him, which seemed to fuel him even more.”

Finishing his dodge ball story, Eddie explains, “so, later that night, the Chuckie’s mother called my mother, telling her what a bully I was. I could hear the Chuckie’s mother yelling on the other end of the phone. So, after ten minutes of the Kathryn yelling at my mother, my mother finally

told her, ‘why don’t you jump in a lake, Kathryn? Wait. On second thought, you’d better not. It might cause a tsunami.’ The Chuckie’s mother started yelling at my mother even louder. So, my mother just hung up the phone.” Mark comments, “and, that’s when the big problems with the Chuckie really started, way back in sixth grade.”

Noon arrives, and so does the catering van from the pizzeria delivering the pizza. Hearing the van pull into the driveway, Eddie, Jr. yells out, “the pizza’s here!” Dawn yells out, “pizza!” Mark, Jr. and Hunter are racing toward the steps to get out of the pool, an early sign of their competitiveness. The kids all rush out of the pool, and dry off, wanting to be the first to get a slice. But, they’ll be enough pizza for everybody, and a few leftovers.

Over lunch, Eddie mentions, “I got some interesting news last week.” Braden asks, “what’s that?” Eddie replies, “Angelo is moving back to the States in a few months.” Paula exclaims, “what? When did this come about?” Eddie explains, “he’s doing really good over in Greece. But, now his wife is really missing living here. So, he sold his service station in Greece and is moving back.” Kathy recalls, “I thought they moved back to Greece because his wife missed Greece.” Eddie replies, “they did.” Paula comments, “she should make up her mind.” Mark asks, “what’s Angelo going to do when he gets here?” Eddie replies, “Angelo told me that his plan is to open a shop down near the beach somewhere. He’s in no rush, though.”

Kathy, who already knew Angelo was returning, tells everyone, “it will be really nice to have Angelo back here again.” Paula agrees, saying, “yeah. I still remember the day he told me that Vinnie had a Jeep come into the shop.” Kathy reminds Paula, “I remember that day too. You rode your bicycle over to Eddie’s house in a panic over what to do. Wow! Did I ever have to calm you down!” Paula replies, “please, don’t remind me.” Barbara comically informs Paula, “she just did remind you, girl.” Kathy comments, “those were the good old days.” Paula replies, “and, these are the good new days when we can forget about some things that happened in the good old days.”

Paula, who can have any vehicle she wants, still drives her Beach Patrol Jeep CJ, which, over the years, has received a custom paint job by Vinnie. Paula’s Jeep now has a beach scene airbrushed on the sides. Paula even had a spare tire cover custom made with the Beach Patrol logo she designed when she was in high school. And, Eddie completely rebuilt the engine, added custom aluminum wheels, and replaced all the body hardware with stainless steel components. Needless to say, Paula’s unique Jeep now gets far more attention than it did before.

After lunch, now that it's getting a bit warmer outside, most everyone gets in the water. The kids splash around while the adults toss a ball back and forth. Hoffer, who was a year behind Eddie in high school, asks the group, "are you guys looking forward to your reunion?" Eddie replies, "yes and no. I didn't want to see half those people when I was in high school. Why do I want to see them now?" Braden comments, "all the ones you don't want to see are probably in jail by now, just like the Chuckie." Offering his opinion, Mark tells Hoffer, "maybe they'll be someone there to mess with." Johnson reassures Mark, "they'll be a lot of people there to mess with."

Not really wanting to go to the dance on Sunday, which is on the day after the reunion, Eddie suggests, "why don't we all hit the beach the day after the reunion? Then, the whole group can get together." Mark immediately replies, "that sounds like a good idea to me." Hoffer comments, "we'll be there." Akinmola replies, "so will we, my friend." It takes no time for the group to plan a trip to the beach the day after the reunion.

Akinmola's new girlfriend, Tambara, who goes by Tammy, asks Akinmola, "what's all this about going to the beach?" Surprisingly replying without asking a question, Akinmola replies, "we go to the beach a lot." Tammy tells Akinmola, "I've not been to the beach before. Tell me what it's like." Akinmola replies, "you'll like it. You can lay in the sun and get in the water." Tammy asks, "like I am doing now?" Akinmola replies, "no. It's different. There's sand and the ocean." Braden interjects, "with this group, you'd better get used to going to the beach." Akinmola reassures Tammy, "you'll like the beach."

While everyone is either relaxing in the sun or enjoying the water, Hunter, coming out of the house where he went to the bathroom, announces, "there's a boogie man in the driveway." Braden asks, "how do you know there's a boogie man in the driveway?" Showing all his expertise in dealings with the boogie man, Hunter replies, "because he's hiding behind the cars." Braden asks, "what was the boogie man doing?" Hunter replies, "the boogie man is sneaking up on us." Hearing Hunter and Braden's conversation, Mark suggests, "we'd better go check it out. You can never be too careful when there's a boogie man lurking around."

Braden and Mark get out of the pool, and quickly dry off. Hunter asks his father, "where are you going?" Braden replies, "we're gonna go catch the boogie man and put him in jail." Hunter jumps up and down and claps, glad to hear that yet another boogie man is going to jail. Leaving the pool area, Mark whispers to Braden, "it's probably nothing. But, you never know." Braden replies, "well, at least, we know it ain't the Chuckie's ass out there in the driveway."

Braden leads, carefully approaching the driveway, hiding behind a bush. Moving in closer, Braden and Mark hide behind a second bush, looking down the line of cars. Hearing the scuffing of feet, Braden whispers to Mark, “it sounds like we got a problem.” Mark whispers to Braden, “what’s the plan, bro?” Braden, now an expert in tactical maneuvers, replies, “let’s just wait a minute, and see what we got.” It never makes any sense to barge into a situation of which you know nothing about.

Braden and Mark hear the sound of a lug nut being cracked¹. Mark whispers to Braden, “it sounds like someone’s stealing wheels. That sounded like it came from where you’re parked.” Braden replies, “those are some expensive ass wheels on my Volkswagen Bus.” Braden suggests, “that’s one lug nut. He’s got three more to go. Let’s move in.” Braden and Mark move closer, staying down low so they cannot be seen.

Approaching his Dune Buggy, Braden is puzzled. Hearing again the sound of a bolt being cracked, Braden does not see that his Bus is jacked up. At the sound of a third bolt being cracked open, Braden points to Mark, then to the left side of the vehicle, signifying that Mark should approach the vandal from that direction. Braden points to himself, then to the right side of his Bus. Braden gives a hand signal, and he and Mark quickly move in.

Moving around to the passenger’s side of Braden’s Bus, Braden and Mark rush and startle the vandal. Braden yells out, “freeze! Don’t move!” Leaving his lug wrench attached to the lug nut, the vandal tries to make a run for it. Quickly taken down by Mark, today’s surprise visitor has been caught red handed. Mark returns the would-be thief to the vertical position, and exclaims, “look what we caught!” Braden asks McCutchen, exclaiming, “what’s your ass doing to my Bus? And, you better have a really good answer! I’m listening, so your fat ass can start talking now.”

Pointing to behind Braden, Mark exclaims, “watch out!” Braden quickly turns around, intercepting a tire iron that a second intruder was about to slam down on Braden’s head. Braden disarms the intruder, places him in an arm lock and, smashing his face against a tree, asks, “what is your ass doing here, junior?” Not getting a good look at the second intruder, Mark asks, “who is that?” Smashing his would be attacker’s face against the tree one more time, Braden replies, “this is Brad Evans. And, there’s a few people I know who would like to see his fat ass behind bars!” Mr. Frazier

¹ Cracked: A mechanic’s term. To loosen a bolt, often accompanied by a loud “cracking” sound, hence the origin of the term.

and Coach Leighton would occupy the top of that list. Braden yells out toward the pool, “hey! Erika! Get over here!”

While he is waiting for Erika, Braden asks McCutchen and Evans, “now, just what are you two assholes doing over here at Eddie’s house?” Trying to kick Braden, Evans demands, “let me go!” Braden gives Evans a swift kick behind the knees, and forcefully shoves him to the ground. Retrieving Evans from the ground and again placing him in an arm lock, Braden tells Evans, “shut up, junior. I ask the questions. Your job is to answer them. Now, what is your fat ass doing here?” Evans struggles to get away, but has no such luck.

Meanwhile, Mark is messing with McCutchen, holding him in an arm lock, kicking him behind his knees, and watching his knees buckle. In a slick move, McCutchen tries to back kick Mark but, while McCutchen’s right leg is in the air, Mark kicks McCutchen behind his left knee. McCutchen falls to the ground, landing on both knees, exclaiming, “let me go!” Mark tells McCutchen, “hey, junior. Shut up, and tell us what you’re doing here.”

Erika arrives with Eddie, Bobby B., along with a few others. Announcing her entrance, Erika yells out, “what do we have here?” Tightening the arm lock he has on McCutchen, Mark replies, “two crybabies.” In response, McCutchen screams out in pain. Braden explains, “McCutchen had a lug wrench on my wheels. And, I don’t know what this other asshole was doing with the lug wrench he was gonna hit me with, but, if he doesn’t stay still, I’m gonna break his flimsy arm off. Maybe I’ll pop him on his head with his lug wrench. We’ll see how much that empty skull of his echoes.” Seeing the situation, Erika tells Kathy, “go inside, please, and get a uniform officer out here.” Kathy replies, “will do.”

Eddie, seeing the lug nut still attached to Braden’s wheels, has been examining the other vehicles. Returning to the group, Eddie walks up to McCutchen, who is still held in an arm lock by Mark. Eddie forcefully punches McCutchen in his stomach, telling him, “you’re trespassing!” Eddie informs Braden and Mark, “they’ve removed all the lug nuts except for one on half the cars here. On each of the wheels, they left one lug nut loose. And, on Bobby B’s. Dune Buggy, they removed all the lug nuts. All the wheels would have fallen off after driving ten feet.” Hearing the news, Braden tells McCutchen and Evans, “it sounds like your two asses are in a whole lot of trouble!”

Hearing the news, Erika asks Eddie, “do you have anything that I can use to restrain them?” Eddie replies, “yeah. Come with me.” As he is passing by Mark, Eddie whispers, “rough them up.” Eddie and Erika go into Eddie’s detached garage, where Eddie has an assortment of items that can be used as restraints. Erika asks, “do you have any wire ties?”

Eddie asks, “large or small?” Erika replies, “the largest size you have.” Reaching onto a shelf, Eddie pulls down a package of three-foot long wire ties, asking Erika, “how are these?” Erika smiles, and replies, “perfect. What are these used for?” Eddie replies, “air-conditioning duct work. I replaced all my air ducts about two years ago.”

Eddie and Erika return with the ties. Erika gets to work restraining McCutchen, tying his wrists together behind his back and tying his ankles together using the ties. Erika tells Mark, “he won’t go anywhere now.” Mark replies, “good,” as he puts one foot in front of McCutchen’s ankles, and pushes him to the ground. McCutchen, with his arms tied behind his back and ankles tied together, face plants hard onto the concrete. Mark tells McCutchen, “hey! Be careful, junior! The driveway was just pressure washed!”

Erika announces, “next.” Braden brings Evans over for his lesson in being restrained. Seeing how McCutchen just got restrained, Evans kicks and fights as Erika attempts to fasten the restraints to his ankles. Seeing the struggle, Eddie suggests, “why don’t you just belt his ass to the tree?” Erika replies, “that’s a good idea.” Braden drags Evans to a nearby tree, as Erika fastens one duct strap to the other, making one six-foot strap. Braden shoves Evans against the tree as Erika fastens him to the tree. Using another strap, Erika ties Evan’s hands together, announcing, “that should hold him for a while.” Erika then straps Evans’ ankles together.

While they are waiting, Wendy and Hunter walk down the driveway, wondering what all the commotion is about. Seeing McCutchen and Evans restrained, Hunter exclaims, “you caught the boogie man! No! You caught two boogie mans!” Braden replies, “that’s right, son! We caught two boogie men! And, both of them are going to jail.” Hunter jumps up and down, clapping, and is glad to see two more boogie men will be off the streets.

Eddie returns, and explains to his friends, “these two idiots removed all the lug nuts from the wheels, except for one lug nut on each wheel, on half the cars here. On those vehicles, they left one lug nut slightly loose. The wheels would have started wobbling down the road. It’s hard to say, but it’s possible the stud would have cracked and the wheel would fall off. And, on Bobby B. and Erika’s Dune Buggy, they removed all the lug nuts. Bobby B. would have driven only a few feet before the first wheel fell off.” Paula exclaims, “what a bunch of shit heads!” Everyone standing around now looks at McCutchen and Evans with more disdain than ever. Eddie tells Kathy, “go inside and get your camera, and get pictures of their work.”

The police car arrives, driving slowly up the driveway. Erika already knows who is on duty today. If this were next weekend, Erika would be

the officer on duty. Officer Wilson walks up, asking, "what do we got going on here?" Erika replies, "trespassing, vandalism, and attempted manslaughter so far." Officer Wilson asks, "attempted manslaughter? I got to hear this." Erika tells Eddie, "show Officer Wilson what you found." Eddie, Erika, and Officer Wilson take a walk down the driveway, examining the evidence. Kathy follows, photographing the lug nuts tossed off to the side and the wheels with missing lug nuts.

Braden, wondering how McCutchen and Evans knew there was a party today at Eddie and Kathy's house, asks Evans, "how did your asses know we were all here today?" Evans replies, "I ain't telling you shit." Braden informs Evans, "if you ain't telling me shit, I'll just kick the shit out of you. The shit's coming out of you one way or another." Braden asks McCutchen, "how about you? Is your ass gonna talk, or do you want the shit kicked out of you, too?" McCutchen tells Braden, "shut up." Braden informs McCutchen and Evans, "that's okay. Both of your asses are going down for attempted manslaughter. In this State, attempted manslaughter carries a twenty-year minimum sentence. I'm glad it ain't my ass going to the slammer."

Now in a panic, Evans tells McCutchen, "I thought you said this was going to be easy! Twenty years is a long time!" Braden tells Evans, "easy? What are you talking about? You're looking at twenty years of hard time, junior! The wheels on those cars were gonna fall off! You could have killed someone if we didn't catch your asses!" McCutchen tells Evans, "we're not getting twenty years. Don't listen to him." Braden laughs, and tells McCutchen, "you might be right about that. With your record, junior, you might get more than the minimum, especially since you guys are looking at several counts of what else the district attorney decides to throw at your asses."

Now even more angry, Evans looks at McCutchen, and tells him, "thanks a lot! I really didn't need this!" McCutchen replies, "how was I supposed to know we were going to get caught?" Quite perturbed, Evans tells McCutchen, "a lot of good that does us now." McCutchen and Evans continue to exchange words, as Evans gets quite furious. Braden's intent was to pit McCutchen against Evans, which is working quite well. Braden listens to Evans and McCutchen's conversation carefully, hoping to hear some evidence against them.

Braden tells Evans and McCutchen, "now that I think about it, you two clowns got caught with all that stolen surveillance equipment back when I was at the University." Focusing on McCutchen, Braden exclaims, "and, if I remember correctly, junior, you knew exactly when to be at the beach for Mark and Paula's wedding. And, your ass showed up trying to steal Tessa's Dune Buggy one year. Shit! You even knew when we were at the pool that time you planted pot in our Dune Buggies with that Dulaney

guy! How does your ass always know where we are and what we're doing? Both of you are always sticking your asses in everyone else's business." Braden thinks for a moment, then announces, "I'll be right back." Braden walks away, thinking he has solved the mystery of how McCutchen seems to always know what the tribe is up to.

Meanwhile, Officer Wilson is not too happy with what he is seeing, telling Erika, "there's obviously a clear intent to cause harm or bodily injury." Erika suggests to Officer Wilson, "just throw the book at them, and let the district attorney sort out the charges." Officer Wilson, knowing McCutchen's and Evans' history, replies, "I'm going to have to run this one by Captain Hayes. For now, I'll take them in for trespassing and vandalism and stick them in the tank. On Monday, we'll sort out the other charges." Overhearing from a distance that they will be taken to jail, Evans yells at McCutchen, "you idiot!"

Returning to the group, Officer Wilson sees Evans and McCutchen arguing with each other. Officer Wilson asks Eddie, "do you have a wire cutter?" Eddie replies, "yeah. Let me get it," and walks to his detached garage where all his tools are.

Officer Wilson asks McCutchen and Evans, "do either of you two want to explain why you were removing lug nuts from eight vehicles parked here today?" Quite perturbed and angry with McCutchen, Evans responds, "Todd wanted to get back at Eddie for throwing him like a hammer during that so-called track dedication thing at his high school." McCutchen tells Evans, "shut up, already! You're going to get us in more trouble!" Braden laughs, and exclaims, "trouble? You ain't seen nothing yet!"

Eddie removes the restraints from McCutchen and Evans. Officer Wilson cuffs McCutchen and Evans, arrests them for trespassing and vandalism, and reads them their rights. Hearing no other charges, McCutchen tells Evans, "see? All we got was trespassing and vandalism. We'll get off." Officer Wilson boldly informs McCutchen, "don't get your hopes up too much. There are more charges coming. I don't know whether to charge you with attempted murder or attempted homicide. We'll sort those charges out downtown." Evans screams out at McCutchen, "see! I told you! You idiot! What did you get us into? Every time you mess with these guys, you get your ass burned! And, now mine!" Evans, sorely ticked off at McCutchen, is now primed to confess.

Braden, who returned from his side investigation a moment ago, laughs, telling McCutchen and Evans, "see? What did I tell you two assholes? Your asses don't know how lucky you are by getting twenty years! If someone around here decided to kick your ass, you're gonna spend half a year in the hospital where they're gonna try to put you back together again. And, then, you might never walk again, just like that guy

who broke into Eddie and Kathy's house." Officer Wilson tells Braden, "I remember when that Vio Otto guy broke in. I took that call. From what I hear, Vio Otto still isn't doing too good." Braden then points at McCutchen, reminding him, "look what happened to you when Kathy kicked your ass back in college! Imagine what these guys could do!"

Braden then informs the group, "guess what? I found out how McCutchen always knows where we are." Mark asks, "how's that?" Braden explains, "I went down and took a look at his car that's parked around the corner. He's got a two-way radio, just like ours. And, McCutchen's got his radio tuned to the channel we always use." Mark exclaims, "the radio! That's right! I have one in my truck. Paula has one in her Dune Buggy. And we have one in our Bus! We're always talking to each other!" Hearing the news, Kathy replies, "I'll be right back. I'm going to get a picture of that, too."

Overhearing Braden, McCutchen exclaims, "you have no right looking in my car!" Braden replies, "there ain't no law against looking through the windows of a car parked on a public road, junior. So, shut your ass up already." Now displaying that he is even more ticked off, Evans tells McCutchen, "you know what? You're a real idiot! How are we going to get out of this one?" McCutchen replies, "shut up, already! I told you! You're going to get us in more trouble!" Braden laughs, and informs Evans and McCutchen, "I already told you guys. Your asses are already in more trouble than you know!"

Braden then suggests to Officer Wilson, "that sounds like a confession to me. You might as well add stalking to their list of charges." Any stalking charge is not likely to stick, but Officer Wilson knows Braden is playing a mind game with McCutchen and Evans. Needless to say, Braden has won. And, as usual, McCutchen has lost.

Hearing and seeing enough, Officer Wilson takes McCutchen and Evans away. Most of the group heads back to the pool. Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. spend the next half hour searching for lug nuts and reinstalling them on the vehicles. Eddie and Bobby B. also inspect each vehicle carefully, making sure there is no other damage caused by McCutchen and Evans.

Back at the pool, Hunter boasts, "my daddy caught two more boogie mans!" Paula tells Hunter, "hopefully, the two boogie men will be in jail for a long time." Kathy comments, "we haven't seen or heard from those idiots for a while. I know McCutchen was at the track dedication, but I don't know about Evans." Paula replies, "I don't remember seeing Evans there. But, we were way too busy with other things." Everyone gets back in the water, enjoying the rest of the afternoon.

A while later, Eddie, Bobby B., and Mark arrive back at the party. Eddie announces, “everyone’s vehicle is ready to go. We checked them over, and they’re good, except for Johnson and Mitchell. We can’t find one of your lug nuts, so I put a temporary lug nut on. Stop by the service station sometime, and I’ll replace it with a matching one.” Everyone cheers, glad to hear that McCutchen and Evans did not cause too much damage.

As the evening approaches, a few of the guests head home. Those who have kids are the first to leave as, after a fun filled day, the kids are ready to go to sleep. Johnson and Barbara are among them, as George is falling asleep from the longer than usual day. And, Hunter will sleep a whole lot better tonight, knowing that two more boogie men are off the streets.

Mid Summer, at the service station, Eddie and Bobby B. are taking a lunch break when an unwanted visitor drives into the station. Eddie tells Bobby B., “here comes some big time trouble.” Looking out the window and seeing the visitor, Bobby B. smiles, and asks, “I wonder what she wants.” Eddie replies, “two to one she’s going to blame me for something.” Bobby B. comments, “at least we’re done with lunch.”

As the former customer walks through the door, Eddie asks, “what can I do for you today, Mrs. Black?” Mrs. Black yells out, “Edward Bogenskaya, this time you have really done it! You are not getting away with it!” Eddie shrugs his shoulders, looks at Bobby B., commenting, “I wonder what I did this time.” Bobby B. replies, “Jake probably found that you installed her Johnson rod backwards.” Eddie nonchalantly tells Bobby B., “yeah. Well, sometimes that happens and they fall out.” Bobby B. comments, “I’ve seen a few Johnson Rods laying on the side of the road recently.”

Continuing her tirade, Mrs. Black yells out, “Edward Bogenskaya, you burned Charles’ house down! I know you did it! His house didn’t burn down all by itself! It couldn’t have!” Eddie laughs, telling Mrs. Black, “houses burn down every day. I guess the poor little Chuckie’s number just came up.” Mrs. Black yells out, “I knew it! I knew it was you all the time, Edward Bogenskaya! I can see it in your attitude. You’re just, you know!” Mrs. Black screams, not being able to find the words to vent her frustration and anger.

Bobby B. asks Mrs. Black, “how do you know that it wasn’t me? Or, how about Erika? Maybe Braden burned the Chuckie’s house down.” Eddie adds, “who knows? It could have been Wendy. Wendy knows how to start a fire. I saw her start a fire in a fireplace once.” Bobby B. confidently suggests, “on second thought, I think it was Hunter. Hunter thinks the Chuckie is the boogie man.”

Mrs. Black screams out, "I've had enough of you guys already! This is no laughing matter! I know that Eddie burned Charles' house down!" Eddie asks Bobby B., "did she just say something? I must have missed it." Bobby B. replies, "I think she said you burned the little Chuckie's house down." Mrs. Black exclaims, "aren't you even listening to me?" Eddie calmly replies, "um, no."

Eddie suggests to Mrs. Black, "you know, the Chuckie could always use his drug money, and buy another house." With his own suggestion, Bobby B. tells Mrs. Black, "or, he could always move back in with you." Mrs. Black exclaims, "both of you should be ashamed of yourselves! Have you no decency?" Eddie asks Bobby B., "are you ashamed of yourself?" Bobby B. replies, "no. Are you?" Eddie replies, "let me think about this." Pausing for a moment, Eddie replies, "no." Ignoring Mrs. Black, Bobby B. observes, asking, "I wonder what her next line of attack will be."

Listening to Eddie's and Bobby B's. side commentary, Mrs. Black exclaims, "I'm going to call the police, Edward Bogenskaya! This time, you're not getting away with this." Eddie calmly offers, "if you want, you can use my phone." Mrs. Black coldly replies, "I think I will." Eddie slides the phone across the desk, telling Mrs. Black, "go for it." Mrs. Black calls the police, demanding that an officer gets over to Eddie's Service Station immediately.

As Mrs. Black is awaiting the arrival of the police, she is outside pacing back and forth, wearing out the concrete. Sitting in the air-conditioned office, as Eddie and Bobby B. are awaiting the police, Eddie asks Bobby B., "is Erika working today?" Bobby B. smiles, and replies, "yes, she is. Hopefully, she'll get the call." Eddie smiles, also hoping that Erika is the officer who arrives.

A police car drives up and, seeing no urgent situation, the officer is slow to get out of the vehicle. Mrs. Black hastily hobbles over to the police car, yelling, "he's in there! Edward Bogenskaya burned my son's house down! I want something done about it!" For the moment, the officer, talking with the dispatcher over the radio, ignores Mrs. Black.

Not hearing a word of what Mrs. Black said, Erika opens the door, and gets out of her car. Erika asks, "are you the one who called us?" Mrs. Black replies, "of course, I am!" Erika asks, "and, what's your complaint?" Recalling that, when her son, Charles, was in high school, Erika kicked the shit out of him, Mrs. Black exclaims, "I don't want you here! Get someone else out here!" Erika replies, "fine, then. I'll write it up as another 10-73." Mrs. Black has no idea that a 10-73 refers to a crazy person or mental patient.

Erika walks toward the office to say hello to Bobby B. and Eddie. Seeing Erika walk in, Eddie tells her, "it wasn't me." Bobby B. tells Erika, "it wasn't me, either." Erika asks, "what's going on here?" Eddie replies, "Mrs. Black thinks I burned the Chuckie's house down." Erika asks, "she what?" Eddie explains, "she came into the office, accusing me of burning the Chuckie's house down. So, we just messed with her. Then, she wanted to call the police. So, I told her she can use my phone." Bobby B. tells Erika, "she's going crazy. Can you please get her out of here?" Erika replies, "sure. No problem. I'll get her out of here." Eddie, Bobby B., and Erika talk for a while, as Mrs. Black incorrectly thinks Erika is interrogating the two mechanics.

Erika walks outside, greeted by Mrs. Black who asks, "well?" Erika informs Mrs. Black, "there is no evidence a crime has been committed. If you have any further complaints, please go to the precinct office and fill out a complaint." Mrs. Black exclaims, "that's it? You're just going to tell me to fill out a complaint?" Erika replies, "no. There's more. You're trespassing. The owner of the establishment asked that you leave. If you don't leave, you'll be arrested for trespassing." Mrs. Black exclaims, "never in my day have I ever seen anything like you people! It never ends. It just never ends!" Mrs. Black briskly hobbles back toward her car, not at all appreciative of the treatment she received today by Eddie, Bobby B., or the police.

Erika walks back inside, announcing, "I got rid of her." Bobby B. asks, "how did you get rid of her so easily?" Erika replies, "I told her, 'the owner of the establishment asked that you leave. If you don't leave, you'll be arrested for trespassing.' That's all it took." Eddie comments, "if she gets arrested, she can visit the Chuckie in jail." Seeing Mrs. Black drive off, Erika tells Eddie and Bobby B., "well, she's out of here. I got to get back on the road." Bobby B. suggests, "follow her home, and give her a ticket." Erika laughs, and replies, "that's not such a bad idea." Erika heads out, following Mrs. Black at a distance, just to annoy her.