

Eddie, The Sophomore Year

Chapter One Autumn Semester

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With the Summer over and done with, it's back to school again. This year, Eddie and the tribe are no longer the new guys on the block. They've all made it through their freshman year, passing all their classes. They've not only made the track team last year, but they also set the performance standard that others must strive to meet.

This year, Jimmy Hoffer, who is a freshman, will try out for the track team. Hoffer was the star of the middle school track team last year, winning every race he ran. Bell, Zaino, Ambrosini, and a few others on the team have heard about Hoffer. Many of the upperclassmen are wondering if there is another athlete like Eddie or Mark on the horizon.

The weekend before school starts, Kathy and Eddie go out school shopping together. Eddie and Kathy ride their bicycles to the mall. Kathy is interested in finding a pair of running shorts with a tank top to match, and a good pair of running shoes. When they get to the mall, Kathy asks Eddie, "are you all set, or do you need anything?" Eddie replies, "I'm good for the indoor track season, but I'll need new spikes come the Spring." Kathy replies, "yeah. It's way too early to get those." If Eddie bought new spikes now, they would likely not fit well when the Spring comes. Kathy asks, "what about school supplies?" Eddie mentions, "I think all I need is a notebook and that kind of stuff." A notebook and a few pens are all Eddie ever brings to school. There is no need to complicate something that is so simple.

When they get to the sporting goods store, Kathy tells Eddie, "you're going to tell me what I look good in, okay?" Eddie replies, "you'll look good in anything." Kathy smiles, picks out a few items and tries on each outfit. Eddie gives her either a thumbs up or a thumbs down for each outfit she models. After going through a few outfits, Kathy finds a navy blue and gold matched set of running shorts and tank top. Wearing both

pieces, she walks out of the dressing room, looking at herself briefly in the mirror. Eddie tells Kathy, “okay. That’s definitely the one!”

Kathy stands in front of the three-panel mirror to get a better look at herself in the outfit Eddie likes so much. She looks at her backside in the mirror, making sure it looks okay. Kathy asks Eddie, “does my butt look okay?” Eddie replies, “trust me. There’s no problem in that area.” Liking her new outfit, Kathy tells Eddie, “I like it. I’m getting it!” Kathy and Eddie now move on to getting Kathy some running shoes.

With so many brands and models to choose from, it can be confusing to find the right pair of running shoes. Not for Kathy, however, who searches for the lightest pair of running shoes she can find. It makes no sense to weigh down your feet when you are trying to run fast. It also makes no sense to run in a pair of shoes that are stiff and inflexible.

Kathy finds an appropriate pair, and tries them on. Eddie asks, “how do those feel?” Kathy replies, “awesome! It doesn’t feel like there’s anything on my feet.” Kathy tries on a few more pairs, but she can’t find a pair that she likes any better. She buys the running shoes and the outfit. Obtaining what she set out to find, Kathy is now ready for school.

While they are leaving the store, Eddie mentions, “I have to get a notebook sometime. Maybe they have one here somewhere.” Kathy replies, “oh, yeah. I almost forgot about getting one myself.” Eddie mentions, “yeah. School is like gym class, lunch, and track and field, with a few academic classes thrown in. It’s easy to forget about things like notebooks.” Kathy tells Eddie, “that’s a unique way of looking at it.” Eddie and Kathy find a notebook in a store that has school supplies lining the aisles. They get what they need, and now they are all ready for school.

On the way out of the mall, Kathy suggests, “hey. Why don’t we drop this stuff off and go to the pool or somewhere.” Eddie replies, “yeah. That sounds good. How about some place close by. I’m kind of lazy today.” Clarifying what Eddie said, Kathy asks, “lazy?” Thinking further about what Eddie mentioned, Kathy adds, “yeah, lazy! You’re practicing for school already! You haven’t been lazy all Summer!” Eddie confirms Kathy’s suspicions, telling her, “you definitely got me this time! I’m busted!” Kathy laughs, and replies, “I knew it! I knew it!” Kathy and Eddie then ride to Eddie’s house to drop his stuff off.

While they are at Eddie’s house, Kathy suggests, “hey. Why don’t we go and be lazy by my pool?” Eddie replies, “that sounds great!” Knowing that Eddie is a bit on the lazy side today, Kathy asks, “are you sure you don’t want to do any squats first?” Eddie replies, “not today. I really don’t feel like it.” Kathy remarks, “wow! You really are chilled out! Look at you!

You're really practicing for the first day of school!" Eddie replies, "yeah, you're right! I'm practicing for sitting in classrooms." Kathy asks, "are you sure you don't mean sleeping in classrooms?" Eddie laughs, and replies, "is there any difference?"

Eddie runs upstairs and changes into his swimsuit. When he comes down, Eddie asks Kathy, "does my butt look okay in this swimsuit, or should I get another one?" Kathy tells Eddie, "turn around." Eddie turns around, and Kathy takes a closer look. Kathy tells him, "turn just a little bit more." Kathy looks again, and tells Eddie, "well, hmm. From what I can see, you need to be carrying me on your shoulders a lot more." Eddie asks, "does my butt look fat or something? Are you sure it's not from eating too much pizza?" Kathy replies, "there's no such thing as too much pizza." After Eddie is satisfied that his butt looks okay, they ride to Kathy's house.

When they get to Kathy's house, Kathy changes into her swimsuit. Going into the back yard, they sit by the pool since they both have chosen to be lazy today. Kathy mentions to Eddie, "did you hear? Mahoney is back in the sanitarium again." Eddie replies, "good. He's right where he needs to be." Kathy tells Eddie, "I found out this morning. My dad told me." Eddie reminds Kathy, "well, at least he's not in jail." This time, the rumor is that Mahoney will not be in the hospital for too long. Kathy fills Eddie in with the details, telling him, "Mahoney was diagnosed with an 'anger disorder.' It must have taken a genius to figure that out." Eddie sarcastically asks, "an anger disorder? Fifteen minutes in a dark alley with Braden could have cured him of that." Kathy starts laughing, and finds it difficult to stop. She finally calms down, and tells Eddie, "okay, let's get wet!"

Eddie and Kathy get into the pool. After a few minutes, Kathy has her legs around Eddie's waist, with her head on his shoulder, giving him a hug. Kathy whispers to Eddie, "thank you for giving me such a wonderful Summer." Before Eddie can reply, Kathy embraces him, as they are nearly weightless in the water. Moving around the pool with Kathy on his hips, Eddie holds her in a way that Kathy never wants him to let go. They feel like they are separated from the world and joined with each other, as time appears to stand still.

After a while of moving through the water, Kathy looks at Eddie, and starts to sing her song to him, *The Power of Love*. She can barely get the words out because she starts crying tears of happiness when she sings to him. Kathy finishes her song the best that she can. When she finishes the last verse, Eddie holds her tightly, telling her, "the way you sang that, it was so beautiful." Kathy lays her head on Eddie's shoulder, telling him, "I learned the words so I can sing it to you. Then I started crying, and I couldn't finish it too well. I'm sorry." Eddie tells her, "don't be sorry. You

were wonderful!" Kathy embraces Eddie again, as they float around the pool for a while longer.

After spending nearly the whole afternoon in the pool, Kathy asks Eddie, "do you know what?" Eddie replies, "no. Tell me." Kathy tells Eddie, "we forgot to eat lunch today." Eddie replies, "wow! Yeah, we did! How did we forget that?" Kathy sighs, and tells Eddie, "you've totally turned my life upside down. I don't know what day it is. I don't even know what time it is. And, when we were floating in the pool, I didn't even know where I was." Eddie puts Kathy's hand over his heart and tells Kathy, "you're right here." Kathy whispers, "oh my, Eddie. You melt my heart even faster than you can run."

After spending the afternoon in the pool, they get out and dry off. Kathy says to Eddie, "now, after this beautiful afternoon, and after this beautiful Summer, next week I'll have to find my brain. I lost it somewhere this Summer." Eddie tells Kathy, "it's probably still at the beach, along with mine." Kathy replies, "yeah. My brain is at the beach. It's at the pool. It's at the pizza place. It's everywhere except for school." In a moment of revelation, Eddie points out to Kathy, "hey, now! Wait a minute! So, I'm not the only lazy person here who doesn't want to go back to school?" Kathy replies, "I must have caught it from you. Yeah. That's it!"

Changing the subject, Eddie says, "oh yeah, the pizza place. That reminds me. Today's Saturday. Our families are eating dinner together tonight." Kathy exclaims, "yeah! That's right!" Kathy then mentions, "I need to talk to my dad about something soon. Maybe I can do that before we go out to eat tonight." Eddie asks, "talk to him about what?" Kathy replies, "I just want to know where that stupid rule comes from that says I can't run track." Eddie replies, "yeah. I wonder why you can't." Kathy replies, "I'm going to find out why I can't. I want to see it written down on whatever stupid piece of paper there is that says I can't." Eddie tells Kathy, "if anyone would know, it would be your dad."

Since dinner will be soon, Eddie rides home to get ready. Kathy and Eddie will meet a little later at dinner. Going inside, Kathy waits patiently for her father to get home so she can ask him why she can't run on the track team. While she waits for her parents to get home, Kathy contemplates what it would be like to be on the track team. Before Eddie and the tribe showed up, Mahoney was always dragging the team down, and there was not much life in the team. Now that the tribe has taken over, there is much more excitement, and winning is the name of the game. Kathy now feels like she wants to be part of that if she can.

When her parents arrive home, Kathy, wasting absolutely no time, asks her dad, "so, how come I can't run on the track team at school?"

Kathy's father replies, "well, because of rules. The school boards contribute some rules. Other rules are regional and State rules. The students have to abide by those rules." Kathy's father elaborates, "the rules are there for reasons. For example, in order to participate on a team, a student must maintain a passing grade in all their courses."

Kathy asks her father, "so, where are all these rules? I've never seen any of them." Kathy's father replies, "I have a copy of the State rule book that pertains to sports downstairs." Kathy immediately asks, "can we look at it?" Kathy's father replies, "sure. But, we'll have to find it first."

Curiously, Kathy asks, "can the school make up their own rules?" Replying with confidence, Kathy's father tells her, "no. Absolutely not. Any school must abide by the same rule book as all the other schools. Schools cannot just make up their own rules on their own. If they were allowed to do so, it would be a logistical nightmare." Kathy was certainly glad to hear that.

Kathy's father is involved in the State level track and field events, so he has all the documentation regarding eligibility, rules, and regulations governing the participants at that level. Kathy's father, Dr. Karakova, helped write these rules. His primary contribution was to define the general eligibility requirements for State level competitions, and adapting the generally recognized rules and regulations of track and field for the State's invitational meets. Dr. Karakova also publishes the yearly 'qualifying times' that must be met for an athlete to participate in the State invitational meets.

Kathy and her father go downstairs to the den, and look through the books on the built-in bookshelves along the wall. Kathy's father tells Kathy, "we're looking for a spiral bound book." That will narrow the search down to about 100 books. All of Dr. Karakova's course material over the years has been published in spiral bound books. They search through the books and, after a few minutes, Kathy exclaims, "I think I found it!" Kathy shows the book to her father, who informs her, "that's it. It was revised last year, and this is the newest revision."

Kathy and her father look through the publication, zeroing in on a chapter entitled *Participation and Eligibility Requirements*. They read through the chapter, looking for the wording that prohibits Kathy from joining the track team. Kathy's father finds a rule that reads:

3.2.3. Women's Participation. Women may participate on a men's team provided the following qualifications are met; 1) there is no corresponding woman's team in that same sport during the same season, and 2) the sport is a non contact sport, and 3) all of the other eligibility requirements in this section have been met.

Kathy's father tells Kathy, "here's the rule that you're looking for." Kathy reads the rule a few times, and replies, "I don't get it. How is this?" Kathy's father explains to Kathy, "what this rule is saying is that you can participate on the track team." Suddenly all excited, Kathy screams out, asking, "I can?" Kathy's father tells her, "well, I'm the regional expert for track and field, and I can assure you of one thing. Track and field is definitely not a contact sport." Kathy jumps up and down with joy, screaming, "I can! I can! I can! I can run!"

After Kathy comes back down to Earth, Kathy's father asks, "don't they have a girl on the golf team?" Kathy replies, "yeah, they do. I think her name is Jessica or something. Her father is like really into golf. He helps out with the golf team." Kathy's father explains, "well, the rule is quite clear. I don't see any reason why you can't participate."

Kathy asks, "what's this stuff about 'all of the other eligibility requirements in this section have been met'?" Kathy's father tells her, "the other eligibility requirements are listed above." He points to a few other rules, one of which states that the student must maintain passing grades in all their classes. Kathy points out an interesting rule that states the student must be enrolled in the school in order to participate on that school's team. Kathy's father explains to her that specific rule is to prevent a student from participating on another school's team.

Kathy, needless to say, is all excited. Her father tells her, "I'll look this over in detail after dinner, but I can see absolutely no reason why you can't be on the track team." Kathy's father also mentions, "I'll call Dr. Zunde and point this out to him. I'm sure he'll be very interested." Kathy's father confesses, "they make all these rules, but no one ever bothers reading them." He adds, "I know all the rules that I wrote, but these were probably contributed by the school boards or some regional administrator."

Kathy is now extremely happy. Kathy's father tells her, "okay, well, we need to get ready for dinner." Kathy runs upstairs to get ready, yelling, "I can run track! I can run track! I can run track!" Kathy cannot wait to give Eddie the good news. Kathy ponders how she is going to break this news to Eddie.

Kathy's family and Eddie's family meet for dinner, and the adults immediately strike up a conversation. While they are talking, Kathy tells Eddie, "I have some news." Eddie asks, "what's that?" Kathy breaks the news, quietly telling him, "I may not be helping out with the track team this year." Eddie, who is very surprised and concerned, asks, "how come? Why not?" Kathy tells him, "because, Edward Bogenskaya, I will be running right alongside of you!" Now, even more surprised, Eddie asks, "okay, Katarina Karakova, what are you up to?" Kathy, finally showing her

excitement, explains, “my dad looked up the rules, and they say that girls can participate on the team as long as it’s not a contact sport!” Eddie, getting all excited, replies, “really?” Kathy replies, “yeah! If there’s not a girls’ team, we can participate on the boys’ team as long as it’s not a contact sport!”

Now, just as excited as Kathy, Eddie exclaims, “awesome! That is so awesome!” Eddie spontaneously starts laughing, prompting Kathy to ask, “okay, what’s so funny?” Eddie tells her, “well, track could be a contact sport.” In a serious tone, Kathy replies, “no, it’s not. My dad said it’s not.” Eddie, still laughing, explains, “well, I do remember when Braden told Mahoney that he was going to shove the baton up his ass if he doesn’t run fast enough. That would make it a contact sport.” Kathy starts laughing so hard along with Eddie. Eddie’s father, overhearing Eddie and Kathy laughing, mentions to the adults, “I’m not sure I want to know what can be that funny.” Kathy’s mother mentions, “they get like that a lot when they are together.”

After dinner, Kathy tells Eddie, “I want to try out for the team with everybody else.” Eddie asks, “how about Paula and Barbara?” Kathy explains to Eddie, “Barbara always wanted to be on the team, but the principal, Mr. Crum, told her that she can’t be. And, as for Paula, she’d definitely be on the team if she knew she could. When you and Mark timed us on the track, I knew, at that moment, that I can make the team. And, so did Paula.”

Kathy is the team statistician. She knows that her times are good enough to make the team. Eddie tells Kathy, “it looks like you’ll have to be carrying me now!” Kathy, looking at Eddie’s brother John, says, “hmm. I think I’ll start with carrying John.” Kathy tells him, “okay, I have a few months to get faster. You’re training me, Edward Bogenskaya!” Kathy, now with a plan, goes home with her parents and Eddie with his.

On the first day of classes, Eddie and Kathy meet at Kathy’s house and walk to school together. When they arrive, they hang out in the school lobby watching as the other students arrive. Mark and Paula walk in, and meet up with Eddie and Kathy. Kathy is specifically waiting for Barbara, who arrives a few minutes later, before she breaks the news that she learned this past weekend. Once everyone is together, Kathy tells Paula and Barbara, “come outside with me. I have some really big news!” Mark asks, “are we invited too?” Eddie mentions, “I know what this is all about. Yeah, come with us. This is good!” The five of them go outside and find a place where they cannot be overheard.

Kathy, showing every bit of her excitement, tells Paula and Barbara, “my dad looked up the rules for running track and field! He found out that, if there is no girls’ team, we can run on the boys’ team! Oh yeah,

and as long as it's not a contact sport." Paula and Barbara both scream out, "really?" Kathy tells them, "yeah! We can be on the track team!" Paula and Barbara exchange high-fives with each other and Kathy, as they all scream out, "yes!" Mark mentions to Eddie, "wow! This is going to make things really interesting." Eddie replies to Mark, "and a lot more fun."

Meanwhile, as the girls are screaming in excitement, anyone remotely close by is wondering what is going on. Kathy tells everyone, "my father is going to talk to Mr. Zunde about this soon, so we probably shouldn't say anything until they talk." Paula exclaims, "my lips are sealed, but my excitement is definitely not!" Barbara replies, "mine too!" The girls celebrate for a few more minutes, have a group hug, then go back into the school.

While they are hanging out in the lobby, Paula asks Barbara, "so, what's your mile time down to these days?" Barbara replies, "I've usually been in the four-minute and forty-second range recently." Paula exclaims, "what? Are you serious?" Barbara replies, "yeah. I've been training a lot this Summer." Mark replies, "yeah. She's probably been carrying Johnson on her shoulders." Eddie mentions, "it sounds like Mitchell is going to have a lot of work to do. He won't be number one in the mile anymore."

Barbara tells everyone, "okay. So, this has got to be a tribe secret." Eddie, agreeing with Barbara, also says, "yeah. Definitely a tribe secret for now." Everyone agrees to keep Kathy's news a secret within the tribe until Kathy's father speaks with Mr. Zunde.

In a while, Braden, Johnson, Bobby B., and Mitchell all arrive. The group talks for a minute or so but, since class is about to begin, they all head to their classrooms. Unfortunately, there is not enough time for Kathy to break the news to the others.

When Eddie and the tribe walk into class, Chuckie, the school's nemesis, comments, "oh, wonderful. The jock straps are in our class this year." The tribe ignores Chuckie, along with the rest of the class. They all take a seat by the window, where Wendy is already seated. The window seat gives the best view of the sports field so, when the class gets boring, at least there may be entertainment outside. Everyone sits and talks for a while, catching up on what they did during the Summer.

The teacher walks in, who is none other than Mr. O'Brien. When Braden sees that Mr. O'Brien will be the social studies teacher for the whole year, he mumbles under his breath, "oh shit. Not him. Why did we have to get stuck with his ass this year." Mr. O'Brien is Jimmy O'Brien's father. During track tryouts last year, Braden kicked Jimmy O'Brien's ass not once, but several times. Braden was not the least bit bashful in

pointing out how badly he beat Jimmy. Worst of all, Mr. O'Brien was there to see it, hear it, and feel the ass kicking for himself.

Mr. O'Brien glances over at Braden and the rest of the tribe. He opens the class by saying, "well, it certainly looks like this is going to be a very interesting year." Mr. O'Brien continues, telling the class he is going to now take attendance. Mr. O'Brien, who is quite disorganized, looks through his papers to find the class role, which he is unable to find. He tells the class, "I'll be right back. It looks like they didn't give me the class role."

Yes, they did. Mr. O'Brien was given the class roll days ago, along with all the other teachers during the teachers' workday before the students returned to school. Mr. O'Brien lost his copy of the roll, or, perhaps, his dog ate it. But, Mr. O'Brien chooses to blame his own failure on someone else. Mr. O'Brien then leaves the classroom to hunt down a copy of the role that he, himself, lost.

After Mr. O'Brien leaves, Braden mentions, "why did we have to get stuck with Mr. O'Brien for?" Wendy replies, "everyone in tenth grade gets Mr. O'Brien." Braden mentions, "well, that ain't stopping me from kicking Jimmy O'Brien's puny little ass if he tries out for track again." Johnson tells Braden, "don't worry. He'll try out. And, he'll bring his daddy with him again." Mark tells Braden, "if you run backwards, like you did against Centerville last year, you'll still beat him." Braden tells everyone, "I'll just kick his little scrawny ass down the track like a soccer ball." Eddie laughs, but points out to Braden, "then he'll cross the finish line before you."

Mr. O'Brien returns a few minutes later with the class role, and takes attendance. He goes over the curriculum, which takes the remainder of the period. When the bell finally rings, Mark mentions, "this guy's about as boring as watching paint dry." Johnson comments, "at least it's first period. He won't wake us up." Wendy comments, "you guys are too funny!" They head to the next class, which has got to be a lot better than Mr. O'Brien's class.

When fourth period arrives, the tribe heads to the gym. The class meets in the main gym, where Mr. Frazier will give them his introductory presentation. Before Mr. Frazier begins, he calls Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B. aside, and tells them, "Mr. Moreno, the football coach, wants to talk to you guys. He wants you guys to try out for the football team." After answering a few questions, Mr. Frazier informs the group, "he'll be here in a few minutes. When he arrives, go over and see him. But, don't feel pressured to play if you don't want to. Just listen to what he has to say." Mr. Frazier then begins class.

While Mr. Frazier is speaking, Mr. Moreno walks in. Mr. Frazier motions to Eddie and the rest to go and talk with Mr. Moreno. At the other end of the gym, Mr. Moreno tells Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B., "I'd like to invite you guys to try out for the football team." Braden replies, "I ain't never played no real football before." Eddie tells Mr. Moreno, "the only football I've played is with my friends after school." Mr. Moreno assures them, "from what I hear, you guys will do fine. Come and try out. See how it goes." Johnson asks, "where do we try out?" Mr. Moreno tells the group, "we resume practice tomorrow, after school. We meet in the locker room, and then we head out to the field." After the five minute discussion, Mr. Moreno leaves the gym, hopeful that the guys will show up tomorrow. Eddie and the rest rejoin the class. After class, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B. decide to at least give football a try.

After gym class is lunch, the period that Eddie has been looking forward to all day. He meets Kathy and the rest of the tribe in the lunch room, and they talk about their morning. Eddie tells Kathy, "they want me to try out for football." Kathy asks, "are you going to try out?" Eddie replies, "I want to give it a try, but I'm not really sure that I want to be on the team." Kathy asks, "why not?" Eddie replies, "because I have to train with you so you can make the track team." Not knowing how to respond, Kathy is speechless. Kathy asks Eddie, "you would do that for me?" Eddie tells Kathy, "well, yeah. Track is more important than football. Football will just get in the way of track and our training." Eddie informs Kathy, "I'm going to try out. I'll mess with them a lot, but I'm probably not joining the team. Maybe it will be fun, but maybe not."

Eddie and Kathy eat lunch together, and afterwards go outside and sit on the lawn. The rest of the tribe joins with them, and talk about their day. The conversation eventually returns to football. Eddie asks Mark, "so, what do you think about what Mr. Moreno said?" Mark replies, "I'm thinking of a plan." Mark is always thinking of a plan. Mark's plans usually involve getting from point A to point B in the most convoluted and twisted way possible, leaving a train wreck behind.

Braden asks Mark, "what's your plan, bro?" Mark, explaining his well-thought out plan, tells everyone, "we try out for the team, and make a big mess of their game and rules. We'll play football like we used to play Kill the Man with the Ball. We'll play football like they've never seen it played before." Johnson adds, "yeah! That would definitely be fun! Messing up the strategy and playing football our way." Bobby B. mentions, "they'll kick us off the team." Eddie replies, "you know, I don't really want to play anyway. I really need to focus on training for track." Mark admits, "I don't think I want to play either. But, it will be fun just to mess with them."

Spilling the beans, Kathy tells everyone, "me and Eddie are going to be training for track, so he's not going to have time for football." Braden

raises his eyebrows, and asks, “what? What are you talking about?” Paula chimes in, “oh, yeah! You guys haven’t heard yet!” Barbara is quick to say, “okay, guys. Please keep this a tribe secret.” Johnson asks, “well, tell us. What’s this big secret?” Kathy explains, “my dad looked up the rules for track and he found out that, if there is no girls’ team, we can run on the boys’ team.” Braden exclaims, “wow! That’s definitely gonna make things a whole lot different.” Mitchell looks at Barbara, telling her, “if that’s the case, it looks like you might be going to State!”

Kathy tells everyone, “my dad is going to talk to Mr. Zunde about what he found out sometime during this week.” Barbara points out, “I just remember that wimp, Mr. Crum, wouldn’t let me on the team two years ago, even though I had the second fastest mile time. I really hope he doesn’t try to pull that shit again.” Kathy reassures everyone, “I’m sure that Mr. Zunde will take care of Mr. Crum.” Lunch period ends, and it’s back to class for everyone, with a lot more to think about for the rest of the afternoon.

The next day, after school, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B. all meet in the locker room. Mr. Moreno greets them personally, and has his assistant suit them up in a uniform. Anthony Ambrosini, who is supposed to be this year’s star running back, is suddenly very perturbed. This is not surprising, considering what happened during last year’s gym class. The tribe is now infringing upon Ambrosini’s territory. Also, in the locker room, checking out the new guys is John Beck. Beck, a lineman, is known as “No Neck Beck.” Beck has the reputation of being the strongest guy in the school. On the football field, anyone taken down by Beck is usually slow to get up.

Mr. Moreno announces, “everyone listen up. There are no drills today. Today we’re playing a game of football. Okay, everybody, let’s hit the field.”

Daniel Gaspari, also known as Gump, comes over to talk with Eddie and the group as they all get ready to head out to the field. Gump tells Eddie, “Mr. Moreno was asking me about you guys earlier today. He wants to see what you guys can do.” Eddie replies, “well, I guess we’re about to find out.” Gump reassures Eddie, “you guys should do okay. Watch out for Ambrosini, though. He doesn’t like you guys.” Eddie replies, “I can’t imagine why.”

The team heads out to the field to play some real football. Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Wendy are already waiting out at the field, wanting to see how their guys measure up.

Mr. Moreno has already divided the team into two teams. It is very clear to everyone who the two teams are, as some players are wearing

blue jerseys, and others are wearing white jerseys. The first-string players are all dressed in white, and the second string is dressed in blue. Dressed in white this year is Ambrosini, who is glad to be playing against the tribe in this game. Also dressed this year in white is Gump, who has come a long way since his first season. Eddie and the rest of the tribe are dressed in blue, along with the second and third-string players. Mr. Moreno's goal is to see what the five new recruits can do against this year's starters. Mr. Moreno wastes no time starting the lopsided and rigged game. The first string will kick off first. Mr. Moreno and his two assistant coaches will be today's referees.

The first-string kicker kicks the ball, which is caught by the second-string kick returner. He returns the ball for a few yards, but is quickly taken down. Mr. Moreno, who is calling the plays for the blue shirts today, instructs the quarterback to run the ball, handing off to Mark. Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B. are instructed to play on the line. Eddie will be the other running back. Matched up with Bobby B. is No Neck Beck, but this does not bother Bobby B. in the least bit. No one intimidates Bobby B., who is stronger than most everyone on the football team, well, except for perhaps Beck. Beck and Bobby B. are a good match up on the field.

The ball is snapped, and Mark receives the handoff. Facing 1,500 pounds of defenders right in front of him, running the ball up the middle looks like the least desirable option to Mark. Bobby B. levels Beck in no time, taking out Beck for the rest of the play. Bobby B. takes out a few other linemen, thinning out the defense. Johnson takes out another lineman, drops back, and blocks for Mark. Braden tangles up a few defensive players, keeping them away from the play.

With all the activity going on at the line, Mark scrambles, runs backwards, and in circles, looking for an opening. Not seeing any clear openings, he traverses the field a few times, going from one sideline to the other. Finally seeing the opening he is looking for, he runs toward the goal, making some forward progress. With a few defenders tracking him down, Mark sees Eddie, who just blocked and leveled a defender, a few yards away. Playing football like a game of Kill the Man with the Ball, Mark laterals the ball to Eddie.

Eddie runs backwards and in circles for a while, then runs toward the goal. Johnson and Braden take out a few defenders in the area, giving Eddie time to survey the field. Eddie, with no one remotely near him, sees the safety run toward him. As the safety and Gump run toward Eddie, he stands there for a few seconds. Bobby B. tangles up Gump, not letting him get to Eddie. When the safety gets close, Eddie quickly laterals the ball back to Mark, who runs into the end zone for a touchdown.

During that play, Mark and Eddie must have run a quarter mile to move the ball 60 yards. The play, which took more than two minutes, was not exactly your typical football play. After being leveled by Bobby B., No Neck Beck heads to the sideline to sit out for a few plays in order to recover. A few other linemen are slow to get up.

Paula cheers from the sidelines, “way to go, Mark!” Kathy cheers, “go, Eddie! Awesome!” Mr. Moreno, not believing what he has just seen, tells the second-string offense, “well, it was a good play, but that’s not the way it’s usually done.” What can Mr. Moreno say? After all, the tribe and the second string did just score a touchdown against the first string. The first-string players, seeing what just happened, know that this is going to be an interesting and unusual afternoon. They will obviously need to step up their game.

Mr. Moreno asks the new recruits, “are any of you guys good at kicking the ball?” Braden proudly pipes up, telling Mr. Moreno, “yeah, me!” Braden can kick a soccer ball clear across the field. A football should not be too much different. All Braden needs to do is visualize the ball as an ass, and it will be kicked, and kicked hard. Not to mention, anyone who can run a consistent 55-second quarter mile and squat over 350 pounds must have very strong legs. It is decided that Braden will kick off. With the ball set, Braden takes a few practice steps to get his timing correct. Braden mumbles to himself, “okay, that’s Mahoney’s ass sitting in that tee. That’s Mahoney’s ass, and I’m kicking it. Here we go!”

Mr. Moreno blows the whistle, and Braden takes off. Braden, visualizing the ball as Mahoney’s ass, kicks the ball with all the strength he has. The ball soars through the air over the kick returner’s head, and lands in the end zone. Braden exclaims, “how’s that for kicking ass! I finally got to actually kick an ass with my foot!” Meanwhile, Wendy, on the sidelines, yells, “go, Axel! Way to go!” One of the assistant coaches exclaims to Mr. Moreno, “did you see what I just saw?” Mr. Moreno replies, “unbelievable! And, that guy is a sophomore.”

Eddie, and the rest of the second string, now prepares to play defense. While they are lining up, Mr. Zunde walks up to watch the game and stands with Kathy and the other three girls. Mr. Zunde asks, “so, how is it going out there?” Barbara replies, “Axel just kicked off, and it landed in the end zone.” Kathy tells Mr. Zunde, “Eddie and Mark ran 440 yards for a touchdown. They were all over the field. It was so funny to watch.” Mr. Zunde responds, “that sounds quite impressive. I’m sorry I missed all of that.”

Back on the field, Mr. Moreno instructs Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B. to play on the line, telling them, “your job is to sack the quarterback or stop anyone who has the ball.” This sounds easy enough,

except for the fact that there is easily 1,000 pounds of offensive linemen between the defensive line and the ball. Eddie, the fastest guy in the school, will play safety. No Neck Beck is back on the field, playing on the line, and protecting the quarterback. Mr. Moreno instructs Nick Franz, the first-string quarterback, "it's your game. Go for it." Mr. Moreno wants to see how well his star quarterback will call plays and perform on his own. Franz will call the plays for the first-string offense.

The senior quarterback, Nick Franz, receives the snap, and is looking for a receiver. Bobby B., again leveling Beck, breaks through the line. Bobby B. quickly buries Franz for a ten-yard loss. Once he gets up, Franz yells out to his offensive line, "hey! What's going on here? Where's my protection?" Braden quickly replies, "it's laying on the ground." Braden, along with the rest of the defensive line, leveled the entire offensive line. Mark, Braden, or Johnson could have taken down Franz, but Bobby B. just happened to get there first.

Mr. Moreno yells out, "good play! Good play!" It may have been a good play, but not for Beck or Franz, who are very slow to get up. Moreno tells Franz and Beck to sit out for a few plays, but Franz assures him that he is okay. Beck, on the other hand, is glad to see the bench once again. Bobby B. was apparently grossly underestimated.

Franz calls for a running play, and the teams line up. The ball is snapped, with Franz handing off to Ambrosini. Eddie, seeing Ambrosini with the ball, chases him down. In no time, Eddie catches Ambrosini, and tosses him to the ground like a rag doll. Ambrosini is very slow to get up. Braden gives Eddie a high-five for stopping the offensive play.

Eddie can hear Kathy, on the sideline, cheer, "go, Eddie! Go, Eddie!" Mr. Zunde mentions to Kathy, "well, this is not exactly what Mr. Moreno expected. He expected them to take a year to develop any usable skills."

Ambrosini is not about to let Eddie and the rest of the tribe show him up. Ambrosini has a score to settle, and he wants to settle it now. In the huddle, Ambrosini tells Franz, "throw me a short pass. They have all their skill on the line." Gump points out to Ambrosini, "that's the track team. They're four of the fastest guys in this State. They can chase you down from anywhere on the field." Franz goes for the play anyway, and will throw Ambrosini a screen pass.

Mr. Moreno is convinced that Eddie would make a good safety. So, for this play, Mr. Moreno tells Braden to play safety, and tells Eddie to play on the line.

The ball is snapped, and Ambrosini is quick to get ten yards out. Franz, finding Ambrosini open, throws a screen pass to him. Ambrosini

catches the ball, and runs toward the end zone. Braden, seeing Ambrosini running with the ball, chases him down. Heading toward Ambrosini like a runaway freight train, Braden hits Ambrosini from the side, taking him down hard. Before Ambrosini goes down, the ball comes loose.

Mr. Zunde, standing with the girls, watches as Ambrosini gets tackled by Braden. Mr. Zunde exclaims, "ouch! That must have hurt! And, just think. They used to play this sport with leather helmets." Kathy asks, "really?" Mr. Zunde replies, "yes. But, the leather helmets didn't offer any real protection, especially for a hit like that."

Braden quickly gets up, retrieves the ball, and runs it into the end zone for a touchdown. Meanwhile, Ambrosini is still on the ground, and is motionless. Mr. Moreno and the other coaches run over to evaluate Ambrosini. While Mr. Moreno and his crew attend to Ambrosini, the rest of the team takes a short break.

During the injury time out, Mr. Zunde tells Kathy, "your dad came to the school this afternoon and we talked for a while. He just left a few minutes ago." Kathy, already knowing where this discussion is going, asks, "what did you guys talk about?" Mr. Zunde replies, "he gave me a copy of the most recent rules and regulations regarding track and field, and showed me what he found. It looks like you can try out for the track team if you want." Kathy exclaims, "oh yes, yes, yes!" Mr. Zunde tells Paula and Barbara, "you can try out too if you want." The girls jump up and down and cheer, exchanging high-fives, bringing a big smile to Mr. Zunde's face. The first-string football players, however, think that the girls are cheering for Braden's hit.

After the girls calm down a bit, Mr. Zunde asks Barbara, "so, what are you running the mile in now?" Barbara tells him, "around four minutes and forty seconds on average. Four thirty two was my best." Mr. Zunde tells Barbara, "that's quite impressive. With a time like that, you'll definitely make the team. That's a better time than anyone has delivered for years." Barbara tells Mr. Zunde, "I'll be there! On the first day of tryouts, I'll definitely be there!"

While Mr. Zunde is talking to Barbara, Kathy tells Paula, "he's going to ask us about our times." Paula suggests, "if he does, we'll ask him to please keep it a secret." Sure enough, Mr. Zunde asks Kathy, "what events are you interested in?" Kathy replies, "me and Paula like the sprinting events." Mr. Zunde asks them, "what are your events and your times?" Kathy replies, "I ran the 100-yard dash in 10.7 seconds, and the 440 in 57 seconds this Summer." Mr. Zunde's eyes open wide as he tells Kathy, "wow! That's quite impressive." Paula answers Mr. Zunde, telling him, "I ran a 10.9 in the 100, and I can run a 59.8 quarter." Mr. Zunde remarks, "wow! That's also very impressive!"

Kathy tells Mr. Zunde, “we want to keep it a secret, so please don’t tell anyone our times.” Mr. Zunde agrees to keep their secret, telling them, “I’ll be there on the first day of tryouts. I definitely want to see this for myself.”

Mr. Zunde tells the girls, “I just wanted to stop by and give you the good news myself before I left.” Barbara asks, “what about Mr. Crum?” Mr. Zunde reassures Barbara, telling her, “oh, don’t worry about Mr. Crum. I’m sure he’ll interfere, but I’ll take care of him.” Mr. Zunde then heads home, quite impressed with what he just heard. The girls are also glad to hear that Mr. Zunde is confident that Mr. Crum will not be a problem this year.

Meanwhile, back on the field, Ambrosini finally gets up, and staggers to the sideline with the help of a teammate. Braden notices that the rest of the team allowed Ambrosini to just lay there on the ground. No one came over to see what was wrong. Ambrosini is carried off to the locker room with the help of an assistant coach and another team member. Eddie asks Mr. Moreno, “what happened to Ambrosini?” Mr. Moreno brashly replies, “his lights went out.” Eddie asks, “what?” Mr. Moreno explains, “his lights went out. He was unconscious. He got knocked out. It happens all the time.” Eddie is perplexed at the lackadaisical attitude of the coach.

Braden overhears Mr. Moreno talking with Eddie about what just happened to Ambrosini. Braden tells Mark, “I didn’t sign up for this kind of shit. I don’t want to hurt nobody like that.” Mark points out to Braden, “that’s two down. Beck is still on the sidelines.” Braden adds, “and Franz is looking like he’s on his last leg.” Eddie mentions, “none of them are looking too good.” Mark mentions, “well, at least, Gump’s doing okay.” Braden tells everyone, “if this was the track team, the whole team would be there to help Ambrosini out. They were just letting him lay there. He could have been dead, and they just let him lay there.”

The first string runs a few more plays, and is not able to score. The second string scores another touchdown, followed by Braden kicking the ball into the end zone once again. A few more first-string players are a bit slow to get up, which causes Eddie to remark to Braden, “these guys are kind of fragile.” Braden replies, “yeah. I feel bad about this. This ain’t exactly my way of kicking ass.”

As Eddie and Braden are talking, an ambulance drives up behind the school. This, of course, attracts a lot of attention, causing everyone to turn to watch. The player who assisted Ambrosini to the locker room informs Mr. Moreno, “Ambrosini didn’t know where he was, or what he was doing.” The player then explains that the assistant coach decided to

call for help. With definitive signs of suffering a concussion, Ambrosini is being transported to the hospital.

Seeing Ambrosini taken away in an ambulance, Braden gets very upset. Braden tells Eddie, "I ain't playing no football. I'm going to the locker room. If I keep playing out here, they ain't gonna have a team left by the end of the day." Looking around, Eddie tells Braden, "they're almost out of players anyway. A few more minutes of this, and the whole first string will be benched. I'm joining you. You're right." Mark adds, "yeah. And another hour of this, and they'll all be out for the rest of the season." Braden replies, "I'm doing them all a big favor by not playing." Eddie and Mark decide, along with Braden, to not play football. They tell Bobby B., and Johnson that they are leaving, who decide to leave as well.

Braden bluntly informs Mr. Moreno, "I decided I ain't playing football." Mr. Moreno tells Braden, "you can't quit now!" Braden exclaims, "if we stay out here, you ain't gonna have a team left in an hour! They're all too fragile. They break too easily. Look at their flimsy asses! They all got their ass kicked! So, we ain't playing!" Mr. Moreno replies, "what do you mean, 'we'?" Braden lectures Mr. Moreno, telling him, "if we wanted to, me, Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Johnson could take out your entire team for the rest of the season in an hour without even trying! They're weak and they're slow! And when they get hit, they get up slower than my grandmother! In fact, my grandmother could kick half their asses and my other grandmother could kick the other half!" Braden heads to the locker room, followed by Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Bobby B. Mr. Moreno has no choice but to let them go.

The girls quickly catch up to the guys on the way to the locker room. Kathy asks, "what's up? How come you guys are leaving?" Braden, all fired up, tells Kathy, "they're all dropping like flies. I didn't sign up to hurt no one." With No Neck Beck still on the sidelines, Franz seeing stars, Ambrosini taken away by ambulance, and half the first string on the bench recovering, the football team is apparently no match for the tribe. Mark tells everyone, "yeah, football ain't for me either." Eddie tells Kathy, "I'm not ending up like Ambrosini." Kathy tells Eddie, "I don't want you to!" The tribe heads to the locker room, leaving enough carnage on the football field to convince someone that a tornado had passed through during practice.

The next day, during school, the news spread that the tribe has made mincemeat out of the football team. Ambrosini's absence testifies to that fact. No Neck Beck, who had the reputation of being the strongest guy in the school, is also absent today. It looks like Bobby B. will now be carrying that title, and justifiably so. And Nick Franz, the team's star quarterback, is also absent today. Franz will be glad to see the new

recruits gone. One could only imagine what would have happened if Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Bobby B. stayed for the full game.

Early the next day, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Moreno that the football team needs more weight training and that they need to get in better shape. Weight training is Mr. Zunde's specialty. Mr. Zunde caught a glimpse of what happened on the field yesterday, which, to say the least, was quite embarrassing. Mr. Zunde also reminded Mr. Moreno that the first game is coming up shortly. With several injured players, that was something that Mr. Moreno didn't really need to be reminded of.

Getting another chance to play football, Eddie walks into the locker room during fourth period, knowing exactly what today will bring in gym class. The freshmen, however, are totally in the dark. In their special corner of the locker room reserved for those on a sports team, Johnson mentions to the group, "the freshmen look kind of weak." Braden is quick to reply, "I noticed that. I wonder what they're gonna look like after their ass kicking today." Bobby B. laughs, and replies, "split pea soup." Eddie asks his buddies, "so, what's the plan?" Mark replies, "we'll play football like a game of Kill the Man with the Ball, like we did last year and like we did with the football team." Gump, who will play quarterback for the sophomores today, replies, "I'm looking forward to it."

Once the students are seated on the bleachers, Mr. Frazier, one of the gym teachers, announces, "today we are playing football. The freshmen will compete against the sophomores! Let's get outside, and be out on the field in three minutes. And, please have your team captain picked before you get on the field. It would also be wise for your team captain to assign positions before we get out on the field." Eddie and the tribe are way ahead of Mr. Frazier. They had it all figured out a few minutes ago.

On the way out to the football field, a lot of discussion arises among the freshmen, who have quickly concluded that the game is not fair and that the deck is stacked against them. Braden, with unbridled enthusiasm, rants, "we're gonna kick their ass! They're not even gonna touch that football today!" A few of the freshmen, looking over at Eddie and the tribe, come to the conclusion that they've already lost the game.

On the field, Mr. Frazier quickly instructs the team captains to pick eleven men to start, and the rest will substitute. Further giving the freshmen the impression that the deck is stacked against them, Mr. Frazier announces that the sophomores will get the ball first. Disappointing to the tribe, Mr. Frazier also announces, "this is touch football! This is not a game of tackle! There will not be a kickoff, but you will start your possession on the twenty-yard line. And, there will be no point after attempts." After all, this is gym class, not a varsity football game, not to mention that time is very limited.

Mr. Chubin mentions to Mr. Frazier, "I can't begin to imagine how this game will go over." Mr. Frazier replies, "I know. It's no secret who will win. The question is by how much." Mr. Chubin comments, "it's how they're going to win that's going to be interesting." Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, "you're probably right about that."

Gump, an outside linebacker on the high school's football team and a wrestler, appoints himself as the sophomore team captain. No one objects. After all, football is Gump's game and, after his freshman debut last year, everyone in the school knows he's quite good at it. The freshmen's team captain is a guy named Allen Brady who, on the surface, looks somewhat athletic. Brady, with his long blond hair and tall, muscular stature, gives the impression that he will be trying out for a sports team this year.

In the huddle, Gump, asks his team, "does anyone have any ideas?" Eddie confidently replies, "hand the ball off to me. We're scoring in one play." Mark asks, "are we playing Kill the Man with the Ball?" Eddie replies, "yeah, bro. Of course." Some guy named Ken, playing on the line, asks Gump, "which way will we be running the ball." Eddie quickly answers, "every way. All over the place." Ken doesn't quite understand Eddie's answer, but he will in just a moment.

The ball is snapped, and Gump hands off to Eddie. Eddie drops back ten yards, running in the wrong direction. Mr. Frazier knows exactly what the sophomores are up to, but the freshmen are in the dark. Seeing the defenders approach, Eddie drops back about ten more yards right in front of the goal line, waiting for the freshmen to draw near. Eddie quickly laterals the ball to Mark, who runs in circles for a while, giving the freshman quite an aerobic workout. Johnson gets into position to receive a lateral, which Mark is quick to deliver. Making some forward progress, Johnson then traverses the field and runs in circles, easily evading the freshmen. Seeing an opening, Johnson rushes toward the goal. As he approaches the five-yard line, Johnson laterals the ball to Braden, who walks into the end zone for a touchdown.

Gump exclaims to his team, "way to go! Way to go!" As the sophomores exchange high-fives, Mr. Frazier, addressing the freshmen, exclaims, "get lined up! You freshmen have a lot of work to do!" Brady, the freshman captain, tells his team, "that's only one score. Now, it's our turn. We can do this." Overhearing Brady is Bobby B., who will now get his chance to shine.

The freshmen get into a huddle, where Brady, who will be the freshmen's quarterback, suggests they run a passing play. No one objects, but the truth is that, after the last play, the freshmen are too winded to object. The defense has their own huddle, where Eddie tells

Gump, "I want to play on the line." Mark and Braden echo the sentiment, to which Gump agrees. Johnson will play the position of safety, but suspects he won't have much to do.

The ball is snapped. A few of the freshmen playing on the line get a little banged up as Bobby B., Braden, Eddie, and Mark rush the quarterback. Just as fast as he receives the ball, Brady is touched by Bobby B. and Braden. Bobby B. and Braden jokingly argue with each other about who tagged Brady first, which irritates the freshmen. Braden tells Brady, "you might as well just punt that ball right now! You ain't going nowhere!" The freshmen now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they have their work cut out for them.

One freshman, some guy named Barry, who got leveled by Bobby B., yells out to Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin, "I thought we were playing touch!" Answering for the physical education staff, Braden laughs, and replies, "we are playing touch! But, there ain't no touch for you if you're on the line! How are you gonna play touch on the line, junior?" Appealing to Mr. Chubin, Barry exclaims, "did you hear him?" Mr. Chubin replies, "I did. This is a game of football, not musical chairs or duck - duck - goose. If you're on the line, your job is to block your opponent. The last time I checked, that requires physical contact." Mr. Chubin often pushes students to the edge of their athletic abilities, where performance improvement is found. Occasionally, the less athletic students get pushed to the edge of their emotional abilities.

While Mr. Chubin is giving Barry a lesson in growing up, Mr. Frazier walks over to the freshmen while they are in their huddle, advising them to use the shotgun formation where the quarterback is positioned several yards behind the center. That should give the quarterback more time to evaluate the situation. After the last play, Brady agrees, and takes Mr. Frazier's advice. The freshmen make a few changes, and get into position, ready to try again.

The ball is snapped and Brady receives the football. Eddie shoves one freshman aside, and heads straight on for Brady. Looking for an open receiver, Brady is quickly greeted by Eddie, who ends the play. Addressing the freshmen, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "you got to be faster than that! You don't have all day to get the play off! I want to see some hustling!" The freshmen now know they are in serious trouble. But, after all, the freshmen went from being the top of the food chain in middle school to being shark bait in high school.

As the freshmen plan their next play, Gump suggests to his team, "when they snap the ball, everybody just tie up their line. Don't rush their quarterback. We'll see if we can get them to pass it, and go for the interception." Someone asks Gump, "what if they run the ball?" Gump

replies, “so what? It doesn’t matter. They don’t stand a chance of moving the ball more than a few inches.” Gump then tells Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Johnson, “you guys cover their receivers, and go for the interception.” Speaking for the group, Eddie replies, “got it.” Truth is, Eddie and the tribe can run faster than Brady can throw the football.

The teams get lined up, and the ball is snapped. Five receivers sprint past the defensive line, and their every move is tracked by the sophomore track stars. Brady throws a screen pass to a receiver who is idly standing by waiting for the ball to arrive. Rushing in front of the receiver, Eddie picks off the ball. Eddie quickly laterals the ball to Mark, who is no where near any traffic. Mark runs toward the goal and, realizing that no one is pursuing him, walks right into the end zone.

In an attempt to get their energy level up, Mr. Frazier tells the freshmen, “you’re the offense! You’re supposed to be scoring points, not giving them away!” Brady tells Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin, “those guys are good! What are they, on the football team or something?” Mr. Chubin steps in, admonishing Brady, “only one of those guys are on the football team! This is high school, not elementary school! Step it up a notch!” Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin know that the freshmen are up against some of the fastest guys in the State and some of the most athletic students in the school. Brady, however, does not know that. But, he will find out soon enough.

As the freshmen get in their huddle, Eddie suggests to the sophomore team, “let’s let them pass it again. When we intercept the ball, let’s go for the record for the longest play in football.” Liking the idea, Gump asks, “is everyone onboard with that?” Mark replies, “yeah,” which is echoed by the rest of the team.

The teams get lined up, and the ball is snapped. Brady looks for an open receiver, something the defensive line freely allows him to do. Finding an open receiver, Brady passes the ball, which is thrown short and promptly intercepted by Braden. Braden exclaims, “I got the football! I got the football! It’s time for me to kick ass!” Braden runs in circles for thirty seconds or so, and laterals the ball to Johnson. Johnson runs for a while as Eddie and Mark run alongside him. Meanwhile, Bobby B., Gump, and a few others, wear out a few freshmen, keeping them away from the ball. Johnson laterals the ball to Eddie, who, with an open field, intentionally runs in the wrong direction. Passing by Braden, Eddie tosses the ball to him. Braden runs toward the goal line. Almost to the goal line, Braden tosses the ball to Mitchell, who runs back toward mid field. At this point in the play, Mitchell, the school’s star distance runner, is unlikely to be caught by any of the fatigued freshmen.

Five minutes into the play, many of the freshmen are walking on the field to where the action is. Mr. Frazier exclaims, “get moving! Someone, tag him!” Mitchell runs all over the field and, for the next five or six minutes, racks up about a mile. By now, the freshman offense turned defense is completely worn out. Mitchell, however, is just getting warmed up.

Mr. Chubin, the cross country coach, mentions to Mr. Frazier, “Mitchell is expected to be my best cross country runner this year.” Mr. Frazier replies, “Mitchell is my best distance guy. He’s really giving the freshmen a workout out there.” Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin watch as Mitchell singlehandedly drains the freshmen’s energy level.

Seeing that the freshmen have given up, Mitchell heads toward the goal line. Mitchell laterals the ball to Bobby B., giving the shot doc the pleasure of scoring the touchdown. Standing a yard or so from the goal line, Bobby B., however, is not so quick to score, but rather taunts the opponents. Waving the freshmen on to come and get him, Bobby B.’s gesture does not escape notice. As one freshman approaches, Bobby B. crosses the goal line, scoring a touchdown.

Mr. Chubin blows his whistle, announcing, “touchdown!” Then, announcing the bad news, Mr. Chubin announces, “taunting the opponent. Fifteen-yard penalty. The freshmen will take possession on the 35-yard line.” The sophomores do not care that their team was penalized. And, it’s not likely that the fifteen-yard penalty will help the freshmen at all.

Mr. Chubin announces, “that’s eighteen to nothing! The freshmen are up again.” As the students return to the line of scrimmage, Mark mentions to Eddie, “well, that play didn’t go exactly as they planned.” Eddie replies, “they have no plan, bro.” Mark replies, “yeah. I see that.”

Seeing such a lopsided game, Mr. Chubin asks Mr. Frazier, “do you want to let this go on? Or, do you want to make a few changes?” Mr. Frazier suggests, “we’ll just let them play. It’s their initiation into the real world. They’d better get used to it.”

Mr. Frazier announces to the students, “okay! Line up! Let’s get moving. The freshmen have the ball, again.” As the teams get into position, Mr. Frazier mentions to Mr. Chubin, “I can’t wait until the weightlifting competition this year.” Mr. Chubin replies, “last year, if I remember correctly, some of these guys were quite strong for their age.” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Chubin, “Bradshaw has been lifting over the Summer. So have the other guys. You can definitely see it.” Referring to Eddie and the tribe, Mr. Chubin replies, “I wish the rest of the students in this school would take physical fitness as seriously as these guys.”

The game goes on, which is more of the same. By the end of gym class, the score is thirty-six to nothing. The sophomores could have scored more points, but they spent a lot of time running aimlessly around on the field before deciding to score. All in all, the track team members got in at least three or four miles apiece. Mr. Frazier is happy, seeing his track athletes certainly have great endurance. Mr. Chubin is now confident that Mitchell is at the top of his game, and will be a serious contender this year in cross country.

On the way to the locker room, Brady, clearly a sore loser, sarcastically tells Braden, "I hope you guys are proud of yourself." Still fired up from the game, Braden replies, "what are you talking about, junior? We ain't playing down to you! You gotta play up to us! If that's the best you got, your ass is in deep shit for the rest of this year! You just wait until the weightlifting competition! We're gonna kick your ass in that too!"

Some freshman named Phil asks, "we're having a weightlifting competition?" Braden assures the freshmen, specifically Phil, "yeah, junior! In high school, everything in gym class is a competition! We're having a weightlifting competition, and you're getting your ass kicked! And, I'm gonna be the one to kick it!" Braden is not the least bit restrained in expressing his emotion, leaving many of the freshmen wondering who Braden is.

Overhearing Braden lecturing the freshmen, Mr. Frazier laughs, and tells Mr. Chubin, "now, I'm really looking forward to the weightlifting competition later this semester." Mr. Chubin replies, "so am I. I just hope these freshmen grow up. They were really whiny out there today." As they walk inside, Mr. Frazier comments, "that only means that we have a lot of work to do this year."

Eddie and Kathy meet during midday and have lunch together. After lunch, they go outside and sit on the lawn. As they are relaxing, Eddie asks Kathy, "so, when do you want to start training?" Kathy replies, "now. The sooner, the better." Eddie suggests, "we can go to the portal in the morning before school and, since time stands still, we can go for a long bike ride and get a workout in before school." Eddie points out, "then, we can get two workouts in every day. We can bike in the morning and lift weights in the afternoon." Kathy replies, "that sounds like a plan to me." Kathy wants to do everything that she can do to earn a place on the track team. Kathy then mentions, "I wonder if Paula and Mark would be interested in that too."

Changing the subject, Kathy tells Eddie, "you know, everyone's talking about the tribe, and what happened the other day on the football field. They even cancelled football practice today because everyone needs an extra day to recover." Eddie replies, "yeah, well, football ain't for me."

Kathy is quick to point out, “it looks like football isn’t for the football team either.” Eddie tells Kathy, “I think I’ll just stick to running. We seem to have a lot more fun on the track anyway.”

Mark, Braden, Paula, and Wendy join with Eddie and Kathy on the lawn. Braden bought a get-well card for Ambrosini, and he wants everyone to sign it. Braden tells everyone, “I feel really bad for that guy.” Everyone signs the card, which Braden will mail later today. Mitchell, Bobby B., and Johnson eventually make it outside to join the rest. They also sign Ambrosini’s get-well card.

Mark mentions, “well, now we have a lot more time to train for track.” Johnson mentions, “Barbara is excited, and she’s going to start training more.” Mitchell mentions, “it looks like I’m going to have to work a lot more too.” Johnson tells Mitchell, “you do know that Barbara can run a 4:32 mile, don’t you?” Mitchell exclaims, “what?” Johnson informs Mitchell, “her best is a 4:32.” Mitchell, who is sitting up, falls backwards onto the ground and stares at the sky, contemplating what Johnson just told him. After hearing how fast Barbara can run the mile, everyone decides they need to train harder. It’s beginning to look like the girls might just steal the show during tryouts this year.

Eddie mentions to everyone, “Kathy can run the 100 in 9.2.” Kathy, knowing Eddie is teasing everyone, quickly responds, “yeah! But, that was with the metric stopwatch!” Mark asks, “what’s a metric stopwatch?” With a serious tone of voice, Kathy explains, “it measures metric time. Instead of sixty minutes in one hour, there are one hundred minutes in one hour. Also, instead of sixty seconds in a minute, there are one hundred seconds in a minute. That’s metric time.” Just taking a wild guess, Kathy mentions, “a 9.2 in metric time would be about fourteen or fifteen seconds in normal time.”

Johnson remarks, “we hadn’t learned about metric time yet.” Kathy tells Johnson, “you’ll learn about it soon in science class. Metric time is like milliseconds and microseconds, that sort of thing.” Paula, meanwhile, is having a very hard time not laughing. Braden brilliantly asks, “do they use metric time when they run the 100 meters and the 400 meters?” Kathy replies, “yeah. That’s why the times are so different.” Kathy never expected her comment about a metric stopwatch to be taken this seriously.

Kathy continues to fuel the fire, telling Braden, “it’s hard to find metric stopwatches in the United States, so we still use yards and miles.” Braden mentions, “yeah, I can see that. I ain’t never seen a metric stopwatch before.” Kathy tells Braden, “see? They really are scarce.” Eddie, who has caught on that Kathy is pulling everyone’s leg, remains quiet. Lunchtime comes to an end, and everyone goes inside to class, some of them

believing there is a such thing as a metric stopwatch. That's what happens when you hang out with students who are older than you are.

A few days later, Ambrosini is out of the hospital, and returns to school. Although he received the get-well card from Braden, he has chosen to ignore Braden and the rest of the tribe. He did get word, however, that the new recruits chose not to pursue football. Nothing could have made Ambrosini happier, except for, perhaps, if Braden had never tried out for the team to begin with. Ambrosini has been cleared to play football again, but has been warned that, if he suffers another concussion, it would be best that he doesn't play.

For the next few weeks, Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula wake up early, and ride to the portal. Once there, they pick a time in the future, arrive, and ride their bicycles for an hour or longer. They often ride to the beach, and run in the dry sand. Kathy notices that when she sprints in dry sand, her muscles are more sore than usual the day after. This is a good sign that she is getting a good workout. When they return to their time, they all head back home, get a shower, and head to school. After school, they hit the weights. Paula works out with Mark, and Kathy works out with Eddie. Occasionally, they'll all work out together. On the weekends, it's usually a trip back to the beach for all of them.

The word has gotten around school that certain members of the track team also excel at other sports, specifically football. This knowledge has made its way to Mr. O'Brien, who has been frantically searching for a reason to use this information against Eddie, Mark, Braden, and perhaps a few others. Today, Mr. O'Brien thinks he has found the opportunity that he has been looking for. While taking attendance, it is clear to the class that Mr. O'Brien is in an unusually good mood today.

Opening the class, Mr. O'Brien begins his lesson for the day, explaining, "in every facet of society, there is a clear intent of certain individuals or groups to intentionally injure another party. We see this here at the school in the classroom, on the street, in business, and even on the sports field." Seeing Mr. O'Brien look over at the tribe, Mark whispers to Braden, "here it comes, bro. Duck when the shit comes this way." Braden whispers back, "if he sends any shit my way, I'm gonna sling it back at his ass at twice the speed."

Mr. O'Brien continues, "just reading the newspaper, article after article portrays one person or group pitted against another." Flipping through today's newspaper, Mr. O'Brien tells his class, "let me provide you with a few examples of what I am talking about. In each of these cases, there seems to be oppression of one group against another." Citing a few examples, Mr. O'Brien announces, "employees versus management. The

citizens versus the police. City employees versus the city. A patient versus the hospital.”

Finally getting to his real agenda for today, flipping to the sports page, Mr. O’Brien exclaims, “oh! And, what do we have here? One professional football player appears to have gotten intentionally injured by another during last weekend’s game.” Holding up a picture found in the newspaper of the injured player laying on the football field, Mr. O’Brien tells the class, “they say the injured player here, number 42 on the Riddell football team, may never play football again!” Many students in the class laugh hysterically at Mr. O’Brien’s comment as Mark exclaims, “Riddell is the helmet manufacturer! It’s not a football team!” After Mark provided the rest of the class with an education, everyone else joins in laughing as Mr. O’Brien catches on that he just made a fool of himself.

Once the laughter calms down, Mr. O’Brien lays down the hammer, exclaiming, “I think we’ve even seen one student in this school intentionally try to injure another player recently during football tryouts! As I said, there always seems to be oppression of one group against another.” Mr. O’Brien, who has an axe to grind, is still very bitter that his son, Jimmy, was cut from the track team last year.

While Mr. O’Brien continues to orate his poorly thought out nonsense, Mark whispers to Braden, “I think he’s talking about you, bro.” Braden replies, “I see that.” Seeing the opening he has been looking for, Mr. O’Brien interrupts his presentation, looks over at Mark and Braden, and announces, “does someone over there have something more important to say than I do?” Stepping up, Braden boldly replies, “I think I do! What are you talking about, anyway? Ain’t nobody intentionally tries to injure their teammates!”

Suddenly flustered, Mr. O’Brien paces the floor for a moment, and tells Braden, “I think there was a clear attempt by a certain individual in this school to intentionally injure another player during football tryouts. I’m sure you’re very aware of what and whom I am talking about.” Messing with Mr. O’Brien, Braden replies, “no. I don’t know what you’re talking about. Why don’t you go ahead and tell us? I really wanna hear this!” A lot of chatter arises, with many in the class telling Mr. O’Brien, “yeah! Tell us.”

Perceiving the energy behind Braden and the rest of the class, Mr. O’Brien quickly realizes that he stepped into a pile of muck that he wishes he hadn’t. Trying to get out of the situation, Mr. O’Brien tells Braden, “I’m not here to discuss the matter in detail. So, please let me get on with my lesson for today.”

Not letting Mr. O'Brien off the hook so easily, Mark pipes up, announcing to the class, "Mr. O'Brien is talking about when Braden tackled Ambrosini, and Ambrosini had to be taken to the hospital. And, it wasn't intentional. I was there." Echoing Mark's sentiment, Eddie replies, "I agree. It wasn't intentional." Chatter again rises up, giving Mr. O'Brien a slight hint that he has totally lost control of his class.

Realizing he is in a no-win situation, Mr. O'Brien raises his voice, announcing to the class, "we're not here to discuss what happened out on the football field. So, let's move on to today's lesson plan! We're not here to discuss the minor details of each and every situation, but rather the spirit of injustice behind these reports." Mark yells out, "hey! You're the one who brought it up!" Boos and jeers directed at Mr. O'Brien are heard from the class, giving the communist social studies teacher the impression that he's crossed some invisible line that he perhaps shouldn't have.

Having a question, Eddie raises his hand, which does not give Mr. O'Brien a warm fuzzy feeling. Hoping to move on and avoid the current subject and heckling, Mr. O'Brien reluctantly asks Eddie, "yes, Edward. Your question?" Eddie replies, "you mentioned all those articles in the newspaper. How do you know what you've read is even true?" Mr. O'Brien firmly replies, "if it's in the newspaper, you can be certain that it's true. News reporters and journalists do not make stuff up. They are impartial!" A low level of booing and hissing can be heard from the class, now causing Mr. O'Brien to wish that he called in sick today.

Eddie responds, telling Mr. O'Brien, "last year, in social studies, Mr. Whitehead told us every class period, 'believe nothing of what you read and half of what you see.'" Eddie repeats the phrase that Mr. Whitehead is famous for, with the class joining in this time since Mr. Whitehead always repeated the phrase twice. Turning a deep shade of red, Mr. O'Brien asks Eddie, "now, you really don't believe that, do you?" Eddie and the class respond in unison, "believe nothing of what you read and half of what you see." Apparently, last year, Mr. Whitehead has gotten his point across to his class quite well, unlike Mr. O'Brien.

Realizing he will get nowhere with Eddie, Mr. O'Brien informs the class, "please let me move on to today's lesson plan." Mark replies, "why? You're the one who brought this crap up. Geesh! Everyone knows that half the crap in the newspaper isn't true." Eddie interjects, "yeah. But, which half? That's the real question." Mark exclaims, "that's a good point! If you don't know which half is not true, then how can you believe anything you read in the newspaper?"

Wanting to back Mark into a corner, Mr. O'Brien asks him, "so, you think you know everything? Please give me an example of something in

the newspaper that is inaccurate.” Mark confidently replies, “in our town newspaper, they always get our events and times wrong when they report the track meets. And, it’s the same when they report the football games. They can’t even get the players’ names right. And, last year, when Ronald Rex set someone’s locker on fire, the town newspaper reported that Rex’s locker was the one that was set on fire! I’m sure you remember that. We all stood out in the cold for an hour waiting for the smoke in the hallways to clear after the fire department put out the fire. So, whenever I know the real story, I can always find mistakes in the newspaper story. What about all the other stories in the newspaper? If I wasn’t there, I can’t find the mistakes in the article. So, why should I believe any of it? Mr. Whitehead has a point.” The class again educates Mr. O’Brien, orating together, “believe nothing of what you read and half of what you see.”

Realizing that he is getting absolutely nowhere with his agenda, Mr. O’Brien announces, “we’re now moving on to the lesson plan. If there is anymore discussion of this matter, someone will be going to detention.” Mark asks, “who?” Mr. O’Brien exclaims, “all of you!” Braden comments, “so what? It ain’t track season, so I don’t care.” Mr. O’Brien authoritatively announces, “that’s enough! If there is any more discussion on this topic, someone will be taking a trip to the principal’s office.”

Braden looks at Mark and shakes his head. While Braden, Mark, and Eddie have clearly won this confrontation, it is not worth it for them to continue the discussion. They’d rather spend their time after school with their girlfriends. A trip to Mr. Crum’s office and potential detention is simply not worth it. But, the class is very well aware that Mr. O’Brien just got his head handed to him.

With the holidays approaching, the weather is beautiful outside, so the group meets as usual on the lawn after they eat lunch. While everyone is talking, Eddie is working on a class assignment so that he doesn’t have to do it at home. Eddie doesn’t want schoolwork getting in the way of working out. Meanwhile, everyone else is discussing their training. Mitchell is happy that his times are improving. He is looking forward to the indoor track season, which will begin right after Christmas break. Bobby B. mentions that he is now tossing the shot-put as far as Matt Wood was last year. This is a significant accomplishment for the shot doc. Braden and Johnson do not know how much they have improved because they haven’t been timed recently.

When it comes time to go inside, Kathy tells Eddie, “you’ve been really quiet today.” Eddie replies, “yeah, I know. I just wanted to get this assignment done, and I’m done.” Kathy asks, “what is the assignment?” Eddie explains, “we have to write a one page piece of satire for English class.” Kathy, who has an unusual sense of humor, asks, “can I see it, please?” Eddie hands Kathy his satirical piece, which reads,

O Christmas Tree
by Eddie Bogenskaya

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
How do you like my chainsaw?
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
How do you like my chainsaw?
It's oiled up, and runs so well,
To cut trees down for show and tell.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree
How do you like my chainsaw?

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
No pleasure do you bring me.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
No pleasure do you bring me.
Your balls fall off, your lights won't light,
And all you do is cause a fight.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
No pleasure do you bring me.

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
How dried up are your branches.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
How dried up are your branches.
They're all so crisp and burn so well,
To keep me warm in this cold spell.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
How dried up are your branches.

Kathy reads Eddie's assignment. When she is done, she tells him, "Eddie! This is so awesome! This is fantastic! This is definitely really good satire." Eddie replies, "I didn't know if it was any good or not." Kathy tells him, "sweetie, this should get you an A."

Kathy then asks Eddie, "how did you even come up with this?" Eddie explains, "look across the street. They're clearing the land. So, I got the idea when the worker started his chainsaw and started cutting down what looked like a huge Christmas tree." Kathy mentions, "I wonder what they're going to build across the street." Eddie suggests, "a track and field supply shop would be nice." Kathy replies, "just for you, eh?" Being a nice guy, Eddie tells Kathy, "not just for me. The tribe can shop there too."

Kathy asks, "when do you have to turn it in?" Eddie replies, "tomorrow." Kathy asks him, "can you please make a copy of this for me?" Eddie asks, "sure. But, why?" Kathy tells Eddie, "I just want a copy for me."

But, this is so good, I want to show it to Paula and Barbara too.” Eddie tells Kathy, “okay, I’ll copy it during my next class.” They head to class, with Eddie being a little more confident in the quality of his English assignment.

On the way to class, Kathy flips the page in Eddie’s notebook, and finds another example of Eddie’s musical talent. Kathy asks, “what’s this one?” Eddie replies, “oh, yeah. I was working on that one. But, when I saw the guy cutting the tree down, I got a better idea, so I didn’t finish it.” Kathy reads Eddie’s other satirical piece, and starts to laugh, telling Eddie, “this is hilarious!” Kathy sings the words to the song, which reads,

Seventy six trombones sold for scrap metal,
A hundred and ten clarinets for firewood,
A truck load of tubas make the plumbing for my house,
And a trumpet, an air horn for my car.

Kathy asks Eddie, “hey, can I have this page?” Eddie replies, “sure. Why?” Kathy replies, “I’m going to sneak into the band room and write this on the board!” Eddie suggests, “hey, let’s go do it now, before class.”

Eddie and Kathy take a detour to class by way of the band room. On the way, Eddie asks Kathy, “hey, do you know how the tuba got its name?” Having no clue, Kathy replies, “no. Tell me.” Eddie replies, “the first one was made with a pile of plumbing tubing.” Kathy laughs and replies, “it did not! You’re making this up.”

The band room is dark when they get there. Kathy tries the door, which she finds unlocked. Eddie, the lookout, monitors the hallway. Kathy turns on the lights, and writes the revised lyrics to *Seventy-Six Trombones* on the board. After Kathy is finished, Eddie walks her to her class, both laughing as they walk down the hallway. It’s not hard for anyone to figure out that they were up to something. Kathy mentions, “Mr. Barrett is going to flip out when he sees that.” When they get to Kathy’s classroom, Kathy reminds Eddie, “don’t forget to copy the other song for me.” Eddie heads to his class, where he will copy his assignment for Kathy.

Later that day, the chorus meets in the band room to practice. Before the music teacher, Mr. Barrett, arrives to class, the chorus sees the words Kathy wrote on the board earlier today. The class is amused, and some of the students start singing the revised words to *Seventy-Six Trombones*, which they seem to like much better than the original lyrics. Mr. Barrett walks in and, hearing the students sing, he looks at the board. Mr. Barrett asks the class, “who recomposed *Seventy-Six Trombones*?” No one confesses. Mr. Barrett tells the class, “well, whoever wrote that, please see

me later. That is deserving of extra credit.” Mr. Barrett has a good sense of humor. It’s too bad that Kathy or Eddie are not in the chorus.

Mr. Barrett tells some of the other teachers about the revised lyrics to *Seventy-Six Trombones* that he found written on the board in his classroom. Some of the teachers were entertained by the new and improved song lyrics. The word of what happened in the band room eventually made its way to the principal, Mr. Crum. Hearing this, Mr. Crum has put out the word that someone has vandalized the band room. Nothing was stolen or damaged, mind you, but Mr. Crum has to do something to make himself feel important. Mr. Crum assures everyone that, when he finds the student who is responsible for this, he or she will be going to detention.

On a Friday, Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula decide to go to the beach of the future again sometime over the weekend. Eddie suggests, “how about the beach during the Winter?” Kathy reminds him, “we’ll have to dress in layers.” Since it is getting a little cooler outside, they will have to dress a little warmer anyway. They decide to give a Winter’s beach a try. They can always come back and go to a Springtime beach if they wanted to.

Early Saturday morning, the group is all ready to go to the beach. When they get to the portal, Eddie raises his right arm, and states, “the next snowy beach day on a December afternoon.” He wonders whether such a vague request will work, and he quickly finds out that it does. Even though it is cold outside, they head down the path to the beach. The trip goes a little quicker than usual because they do not have the heat with which to contend.

Arriving at the beach, they find it deserted. They lock up their bicycles, and head to the beach. The sound of waves crashing and a few seagulls are all that can be heard. Eddie and Kathy decide to walk to their favorite place, which is the field of sand dunes past the concession area. Mark and Paula decide to walk in the other direction, to their own private spot. They all decide to meet back in an hour or so.

Kathy finds a sand dune facing the water where she and Eddie sit in the sand. As they watch the waves come in, it begins to snow. Kathy stands up, and runs through the falling snowflakes, as she exclaims, “snow!” Kathy starts dancing through the sand dunes as the snow begins to fall. Who would have thought that something that is so simple would bring great joy to Kathy. Kathy tells Eddie, “come dance with me.” Eddie gets up, and dances with Kathy while the snow falls. They dance for quite a while in the sand. Kathy mentions, “hey! Dancing in the sand is a good workout.”

Kathy and Eddie find a nice sand dune to sit upon, watching as the snow falls. Putting her arms around Eddie's neck, Kathy sits on his lap. Kathy tells Eddie, "we have the whole beach to ourselves, and this is right where I want to be." Totally lost in their own world, Kathy and Eddie passionately embrace each other. When the wind begins to pick up, they move to a small hollow between two sand dunes, and lay in the sand as the heat of their passion melts the lightly falling snow. In a half hour or so, the snowfall gets a little heavier, but Eddie and Kathy do not even notice.

Mark and Paula did, however, notice that the snowfall is picking up. Out in a distance, Kathy hears Paula repeatedly calling out, "Kathy! Eddie!" Eddie and Kathy stand up, and look for Mark and Paula. Barely making them out through the falling snow, Eddie and Kathy see Mark and Paula in the parking lot near the concession area. Paula yells out to Kathy, "hey! The snowfall is picking up! Maybe we should get back!" After all, they are riding bicycles, not snowmobiles. Kathy yells back, "wow! Look at the snow! It's beautiful!" They decide to head back before the snow begins to accumulate.

On the way back, the snowfall begins to pick up even more. They are still able to ride on the path, but it is getting more difficult to steer. With a mile to go, the path becomes somewhat slippery in places. Eddie tells everyone to ride on the grass next to the path, which is much less slippery. Riding on the grass, however, is a lot more difficult. The upside is that the ride on the grass gives everyone a better workout. Since working out is usually the goal, no one really complains. Riding on the grass is far better than slipping and falling.

When they finally arrive at the portal, Mark mentions, "well, that was different." Kathy exclaims, "yeah! That was fun!" Paula suggests, "hey! There's snow! We can make a snowman!" Eddie suggests, "yeah! We can bring one into the portal and bring it back with us." Mark suggests, "we can build it in the portal." Thinking about what Mark said, Kathy tells Mark, "yeah, but if we walk into the portal, we're instantly back home." Kathy, now wondering, mentions, "I wonder if we can really bring back a snowman."

While they are talking, Mark begins pushing a snowball across the grass. The snowball is getting a little bigger, but there's not quite enough snow yet to make a huge snowball. Eddie, seeing Mark's snowball, begins to roll a snowball himself. Kathy and Paula also start to make their own snowball. Kathy suggests, "we'll take the three snowballs back with us, and make a snowman when we get back."

Once they have their snowballs finished, they all walk back through the portal. When they return to their time, they all have their snowballs

with them. The weather is cool, but there certainly is no snow on the ground when they return. They quickly make a snowman between the path and the parkway, albeit a very small one. Once the snowman is complete, they sit back on the path. They all watch, as the drivers slow down looking at the snowman. The snowman doesn't last too long before it melts, but they had way too much fun pulling that stunt.

With the rest of the day ahead of them, they decide to go to the University and run. Kathy and Paula are interested in having Eddie and Mark time them again. With tryouts right after the Christmas break, Kathy wants to know exactly where she stands. Paula wants to know if she's improved any. As they ride past Mark's house, he stops to get his stopwatch. When they pass Eddie's house, Eddie stops to get his stopwatch. They then head to Paula's house and then Kathy's house. They both change into clothing that is more appropriate for running. Once everyone is ready, they head to the University track.

At the track, there are a few people running laps and one guy tossing the shot-put. Eddie asks Kathy, "do you want to run the 100 on the sand track?" Kathy replies, "yeah, I do. But, only if you brought your metric stopwatch." Eddie concedes, telling her, "well, I guess you're running on the regular track then."

Mark asks, "what's all this about a metric stopwatch?" Paula laughs, and informs Mark, "she was just messing with everyone. There's no such thing as a metric stopwatch or metric time." Mark replies, "dang! Kathy really had me going with that one!" Paula laughs, telling Mark, "ha! Well, just look at that! The master of messing with people just got messed with big time!" Mark informs Paula, "yeah. Well, it's not a total train wreck. I don't know how or when, but I'm going to use that one on somebody someday." Someone like McCutchen, who falls for every trick in the book, will likely be Mark's target.

After Kathy and Paula warm up, they are ready to run the 100-yard dash for time. Mark will be the Starter again, and Eddie will be the Timekeeper, working both stopwatches. Eddie tells Mark, "when you say 'go,' have your arm in the air and lower it right when you say 'go.'" Eddie informs Mark, "I'll start the watches when I see your arm begin to move." Eddie's plan will compensate for any sound delay, giving a more accurate time. Eddie heads to the finish line as Kathy and Paula get their energy level up. Mark tells them, "run like you would if it's track tryouts, and this is your only chance to make the team." Kathy replies, "yeah! And, I'm running as if that asshole Mahoney is running it too." Any thought about Mahoney is sure to get Kathy's adrenaline levels up.

With Kathy and Paula ready, Mark announces, "on your marks." With his arm in the air, he announces, "set." Mark lowers his arm as he yells,

“go,” and Eddie starts both stopwatches. Kathy and Paula start running as if their position on the track team depends on it. Early in the race, they are tied. Although they are best friends, right now they are each other’s opponents. Kathy takes the lead, causing Paula to run faster. Both girls find speed they never knew they had. Halfway through the race, Kathy is one yard ahead of Paula. Right now, to Paula, the yard that separates her from Kathy is the longest yard in the world. With only one yard between them, Kathy is not willing to give up one inch of that yard. As they approach the finish, Kathy maintains her lead. Kathy crosses first, with Paula finishing right behind her. Kathy and Paula exchange high-fives and hug each other once they’ve caught their breath.

Kathy and Paula walk back to Eddie, who is looking at the stopwatches. As Mark arrives at the finish line, Kathy asks Eddie, “do I want to know?” Eddie replies, “no. Definitely not. You might get the impression you’re Wonder Woman.” Eddie knows all about Wonder Woman from comic books. Kathy and Paula suddenly get very excited, as Eddie hands each of them the stopwatches with their times. Kathy exclaims, “a 10.4! I ran a 10.4!” Paula exclaims, “10.5! Awesome!” Kathy and Paula somehow find extra energy to jump up and down, celebrating their awesome improvement since last Summer.

Once they’ve calmed down a bit, Kathy informs Paula, “you know, if we had blocks and people watching us, we may have made it into the nines.” Paula replies, “yeah! I’m sure with Mr. Frazier watching, our times might have been better.” Kathy adds, “yeah, I know! And, even better if Mr. Zunde was watching too.” Eddie, looking at Mark, tells him, “this year is going to be interesting and definitely a lot more fun.”

Kathy, all of a sudden, screams, “hey! I tied Mahoney’s best time!” Mahoney’s best time was a 10.4, which he ran consistently during his junior year. Kathy just tied Mahoney’s all-time best in the 100-yard dash. While they are on the subject, Mark mentions to both of them, “you’re both faster than Bell and Zaino.” Kathy and Paula, who were the team’s statisticians for the last two years, know exactly where they stand. They both now know that they have the qualifications to earn them a spot on the team.

Mark asks Paula and Kathy, “are you up to running the 440?” Kathy replies, “yes and no.” Eddie asks, “what part is no?” Kathy replies, “I want some Gatorade or something.” Paula adds, “yeah, me too.” They head to the school cafeteria to see what they can find. This will also give them a better recovery period. After all, after the ride to the beach and back, they all could use a little Gatorade. On the way to the cafeteria, Kathy exclaims, “I can’t believe it! I ran a 10.4!”

Mark asks Eddie, “hey, did you bring your metric stopwatch, or the regular one?” Paula bumps Mark’s hip with hers, telling him, “listen to you now! Remind me again for how many weeks you thought there was such a thing as a metric stopwatch.” They all laugh with each other as they walk into the cafeteria.

Now that Kathy and Paula are rehydrated, they are ready to run the quarter mile. Kathy and Paula are both all fired up, and ready to see where they stand. Kathy smiles, and tells Eddie and Mark, “you guys can run with us if you think you can keep up.” Eddie looks at Mark, and Mark nods his head, indicating he is up for the competition. Paula asks, “then who’s going to time us?” Kathy replies, “oh, yeah. I forgot about that.” If Eddie and Mark run with Kathy and Paula, they will push the girls harder, resulting in a better time. But, they’ll need a Timekeeper if that is to happen.

Kathy sees someone stretching on the grass who just arrived. Walking up to her, Kathy asks, “hey. Can you please time us in the 440?” The college student replies, “yeah, sure. No problem.” Kathy asks, “what’s your name?” The girl replies, “Genise.” Kathy formally introduces everyone, telling Genise, “hi, I’m Kathy, this is Paula, Eddie, and Mark.” Kathy explains to Genise, “just time me and Paula. The guys are just going to be running with us.” As Eddie and Mark hand Genise their stopwatches, Genise replies, “got it.”

The guys let Paula and Kathy have the inside lanes since this is their race. Genise asks, “okay, are you ready?” Kathy replies, “yeah.” Recognizing that there are no starting blocks, Genise announces, “set.” They all get set, ready to run. Watching the runners carefully, Genise gives the command, “go,” as she starts both stopwatches simultaneously.

Kathy and Paula take a very quick lead, with Eddie and Mark being caught a little off guard. Eddie thought he’d get ahead quickly, leaving the women far behind, and drop to the inside lane. That was not the case. Kathy and Paula are head to head, making it difficult for Eddie or Mark to pass them. Along the first curve, no positional changes occur. On the back straightaway of the oval track, Eddie tries to pass Kathy, but the girls are fighting it out side by side, each trying to get the lead.

Meanwhile, when they cross the halfway mark, Genise looks at the stopwatches, wondering if they run for a nearby college. Back on the track, along the final curve, Eddie and Mark are still unable to pass Kathy or Paula. Once they break out of the curve, Paula takes the lead over Kathy. Eddie moves outside, and sprints to the finish line, with Mark right next to him. Eddie crosses the finish line first, with Mark right behind him.

Genise watches carefully, and stops one stopwatch as Paula crosses the finish line and the other as Kathy crosses. While they are catching their breath, Genise takes a look at their times, whispering to herself, "wow, not bad at all!" Genise walks over to the runners to give them the news.

Anxious to see how they've done, Paula asks Genise, "how did I do?" Genise replies to Paula, "you ran a 56.9." Genise looks at Kathy, telling her, "and you ran a 57.5." Still catching their breath, the times Genise told Kathy and Paula have still not registered in their oxygen depleted brains. Kathy and Paula have no comprehension of what Genise just told them.

Genise tells Eddie, "based upon the distance between you and the 56.9 girl, I'd say you ran a 54 or 55." Genise tells Mark, "you were about a half second or a second behind the winner." Eddie and Mark are amazed, to say the least, at how fast Kathy and Paula ran the 440-yard dash.

Eddie mentions to Genise, "it looks like you've done this before." Genise replies, "yeah, once or twice." Paula, who is now somewhat recovered, asks Genise again, "what did you say I ran?" Genise tells Paula, "a 56.9." Paula screams, "a 56.9. Wow!" Kathy asks, "how about me? How did I do again?" Genise looks at the stopwatch again, telling Kathy, "you ran a 57.5." Kathy also screams, "wow! A 57.5. I ran a 57.5! Awesome!" Kathy and Paula exchange high-fives, knowing they have what it takes to make the track team. Eddie and Mark are surprised, to say the least, at Kathy's and Paula's performance.

Genise, knowing they must run for a college or university, asks the group, "where do you guys go?" Kathy replies, "Northside High." Genise exclaims, "what? Seriously? You guys are in high school?" Kathy replies, "yeah. High school. Stuck there for two more years." Genise, giving Kathy and Paula a high-five, tells them, "that was an awesome race." Kathy tells Genise, "thank you so much for timing us." Genise replies, "no problem. It was my pleasure." Genise returns to her workout, as Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula walk around for a few minutes.

Kathy exclaims, "I ran a 57.5! I'm going to beat Eddie! I'm going to kick Braden's ass! And, I'm going to kick Mr. Crum's ass too!" Eddie mentions to Mark, "she gets a little delirious after she runs a 440." Kathy, all bubbly, replies, "no, I'm not. I'm just so happy right now!" Kathy exclaims, "and, since I'm so happy, I want my discus!" Eddie tells her, "you act so cute after you run!" Kathy replies, "you ain't getting out of getting me a discus." Kathy exclaims, "Eddie, please buy me a discus!" Paula mentions, "I guess we're getting pizza." Mark replies, "yeah. There's no way out of that now."

Mark mentions to Paula, “you know you’re getting close to Braden’s best 440, don’t you?” Paula exclaims, “really?” Mark reminds her, “if I remember correctly, somewhere around 54 seconds is his best, which he runs consistently, but couldn’t break through last year.” Kathy tells Mark, “yeah. I think you’re right about that.” Paula, looking at Kathy and giving her a high-five, tells her, “hey girl! It looks like we’re on the team!” Eddie remarks, “tryouts are definitely going to get interesting this year.” After they have all recovered, they get on their bicycles and head to the pizzeria. After all, Kathy and Paula have to replace all the carbohydrates they just burned.

Before the Autumn semester is over, some of the teachers traditionally exchange Christmas presents during the annual faculty Christmas party. This year, Mr. Crum, the principal, actually received a few presents himself. Mr. Crum is rarely the recipient of any gifts, for he is usually on everyone’s naughty list. But, this year, Mr. Crum gets a little lucky.

Opening his presents, Mr. Crum finds that someone has given him a screwdriver set and a bag of marbles. Both presents have a tag stating they were from Santa Claus. It doesn’t take a long time for the rumor mill among the teachers to get into high gear. The rumor is that Mr. Crum was given the presents because he has a screw loose, and he has lost his marbles. No doubt, the rumor was started by the mystery Santa who left the presents under the tree for Mr. Crum.

The semester comes to an end, and Christmas break begins. With a few weeks off, most of the students who will be trying out for the track team will be sitting around doing nothing for the next few weeks. Eddie and the tribe, however, will not be sitting around and doing nothing. They see Christmas break as an opportunity to train even harder, and gain a competitive edge. Since women have never been allowed on the track team before, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara must prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they are worthy of a place on the team. They certainly don’t want to be given a place on the team simply because they’re pretty.

Eddie and Kathy meet on Christmas Eve in the late morning. Today, however, is not a day for training. They have decided to take a few days off, which will help them be fully recovered when it is time for tryouts. In a few days, after Christmas is over, life will get back to normal, and they will begin training again. Today, they just plan to spend the day hanging out together.

When they meet, Kathy asks Eddie, “hey, do you want to know why I wanted to see you in the morning?” Eddie replies, “I have no idea.” Kathy tells Eddie, “oh, come on. You didn’t even try. Think about it!” Eddie thinks for a moment. He surprisingly replies, “oh, yeah! Does this have

anything to do with a discus?" Kathy replies, "it might. You're getting close." Eddie asks, "and, a shot-put?" Kathy laughs, and replies, "you got it!" Eddie tells Kathy, "pizza on Christmas Eve. That's kind of unique." Kathy explains to Eddie, "yeah, well I haven't had a pizza in a week. And, for all next week, it's going to be all holiday food. So, I won't get a pizza for the rest of the year." Eddie tells Kathy, "wow! For the rest of the year. The way you say that, you make it sound like a long, long time." They head to the pizzeria, where Kathy can have her pizza and be with Eddie.

After pizza, Kathy and Eddie ride to Kathy's house and leave their bicycles there. Walking to the schoolyard behind her house, they find it is all deserted. They make their way to the bleachers, and sit for a while. Out of the blue, Eddie tells Kathy, "I got you a Christmas present." Kathy jumps up and exclaims, "really? What is it?" Eddie pulls a small wrapped box out of his inside jacket pocket, and hands it to Kathy. Eddie tells Kathy, "merry Christmas, sweetie!" Kathy, who is very excited, asks, "can I open it now? Can I? Can I? Please?" Eddie replies, "sure." Kathy removes the wrapping from the box very slowly. Eddie thinks Kathy is taking longer to open the present than he spent wrapping it.

Kathy finally gets the wrapping paper off, and opens the box. Looking inside, Kathy finds a gold heart-shaped pendant hung on a gold chain. Kathy exclaims, "oh Eddie! It's so beautiful! I love it! I love it!" Kathy takes the necklace out of the box as slowly as she unwrapped it. Eddie tells Kathy, "look on the back." Kathy looks on the back of the pendant, and sees an inscription that reads, *The Power of Love*. Seeing the inscription, Kathy starts crying, and gives Eddie a big hug. Kathy whispers, "Eddie, this is so beautiful. I love you so much, so very much." As Kathy kisses Eddie, he feels her tears of happiness rolling from her cheek to his. Eddie puts the necklace around Kathy's neck, which lands perfectly over her heart.

In a while, they walk back to Kathy's house. When they get there, they go inside, and Kathy immediately puts on her song, the Céline Dion version of *The Power of Love*. While they are dancing to the music, Kathy whispers to Eddie, "I didn't buy you anything for Christmas." Eddie whispers back, "that's okay, sweetie. You don't have to." Kathy giggles, and whispers back to Eddie, "but, I have something for you." Eddie whispers back, "Katarina Karakova, you are always full of surprises. What are you up to this time?" Whenever Eddie calls Kathy by her full name, he knows she is up to something, and he is usually right.

After the song is finished playing, Kathy brings Eddie over to the Christmas tree, and finds his present. Kathy hands Eddie his present, telling him, "merry Christmas!" Eddie asks, "should I open it now, or should I wait for Christmas?" Kathy replies, "hmm. If I make you wait, then you have to come over here tomorrow to open it." But, it is Kathy

who can't wait for Eddie to see his present, so she tells him, "okay, I won't torture you. So, you can open it now."

Eddie unwraps the package, and opens the box. Inside, Eddie sees a matching intricately braided leather necklace and bracelet. Kathy tells Eddie, "I hope you like it. I made it myself." Eddie tells his sweetheart, "sweetie, I love it! They're beautiful! You made them for me?" Kathy replies, "yeah, I." Before she could finish her sentence, Eddie embraces her, and they hug each other. Both of them know this Christmas is very special.

Kathy shows Eddie how the necklace expands and tightens up again. She made it this way so that Eddie can put it on and take it off easily. Kathy puts the necklace around Eddie's neck, which fits perfectly.

Eddie asks, "when did you start working on this?" Kathy replies, "I got the idea that day when you guys beat up the football team. I was talking with Mr. Zunde and, when Braden creamed Ambrosini, Mr. Zunde told us they used to wear leather helmets in football years ago. I thought to myself that leather is for tough guys." Kathy then puts Eddie's bracelet on his wrist. Eddie tells her, "thank you so much! It's so beautiful. And, you made it for me! That's the best part." Kathy reminds Eddie, "see? I told you. I didn't buy you anything." Kathy puts *The Power of Love* on again, and they again dance to the music.