

Eddie, The Sophomore Year

Chapter Four The Winter Season

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The track team is assembled, and everyone is assigned their events. When Saturday morning arrives, the team is all excited and ready to win. This year's team is the best team Mr. Frazier can remember over his entire career. He is looking forward to sweeping the gold medal in every event. Whether the team will be able to do that or not is yet to be seen.

The first meet of the year is when each coach displays to the rest of the division the talent that they have. Even though only four teams will be present at the meet today, the news gets around fast of whom the major contenders in the division and the region are. If Mr. Frazier sweeps the gold medal in every event, fear will come upon the other divisional teams.

The three visiting teams arrive early, and hang out around the track. Since this is the first meet of the year, no one really knows what to expect, and everyone wants to deliver a good performance. A few team assistants walk around checking out the competition.

Kathy sees a few team assistants she recognizes from prior seasons, and tells Eddie and Mark, "they're really checking us out." Mark replies, "nope. They're checking out you, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa. You're dressed in the team uniform." Kathy looks around and replies, "oh, yeah. I see that now." Eddie mentions to the girls, "they have no clue what to expect from you. They think either you're awesome, or Mr. Frazier couldn't find enough guys this year so he had to recruit girls." Paula mentions, "I hate to say it, but you're probably right."

Eddie's comment gave Mark, the master of psychological warfare, an idea. Mark mentions, "hey! Since we have a while before the meet starts, why don't we go and practice some sprints. Me and Eddie can run like usual, and all you girls could run like you just learned how to run yesterday. They'll think you're absolutely no competition." Paula and

Tessa start laughing. Kathy likes that idea, and says, "let's go do it!" Barbara, who is running the distance races later, tells them, "this is going to be funny. I'm going to sit back and watch." On the way to the blocks, Kathy whispers to Paula, "Mark is using his superpowers."

When they approach the starting blocks, Mark spies his arch rival, Todd McCutchen from Centerville, practicing his starts. A few other runners are also at the blocks, practicing their starts as well and getting a feel for the track. Mark, seeing what is going on at the starting blocks, tells Kathy, Paula, and Tessa, "don't ask questions. Just play along with me." McCutchen is Mark's primary target. Not only does McCutchen fall for every trick in the book, he also spreads anything Mark dishes out to his teammates and his coach.

When they get to the blocks, Mark tells the girls, "these are the starting blocks." Demonstrating how the starting blocks are used, Mark instructs the girls, "when they tell you, 'on your marks,' you put one foot here, and the other there." McCutchen, who is quite amused, watches Mark explain to the girls what the starting blocks are used for.

Kathy, playing along, exclaims, "let me try!" Kathy fumbles with the blocks, and positions herself in the worst possible position. Mark then explains, "when the Starter says 'set,' you get ready to run. When the buzzer sounds, that's when you start running. Let's go ahead and try this." Mark tells Kathy, "on your marks," then, "set," followed by, "go." Kathy leaves the blocks, nearly tripping over herself, as if it were her first time running.

Paula and Tessa then give it a try, both also acting a little clumsy. Tessa asks, "do I use the blocks in the relay race?" Mark answers, "only the first runner." Putting her hands on her hips, Tessa replies, "how is that fair? I want to use them too!" Paula turns away, and coughs, to conceal her laughter to Tessa's response. Tessa's reply suggests to McCutchen and the other bystanders that she is very inexperienced. The girls take a few practice runs, demonstrating to the competition how poorly they run. Mark looks over at McCutchen, shrugs his shoulders, and tells him, "what can I say?" What it looks like to McCutchen is that his team, Centerville, finally has the upper hand.

After demonstrating the incompetence of the women sprinters, Mark suggests, "how about we bungle a few baton handoffs for everyone to see." Kathy mentions, "this could be Saturday Night Live material." Paula gets excited, and says, "yeah! Let's go do it!" Paula suggests, "I want Kathy to hand off to me."

They get into position on the track, and Kathy approaches the transition zone with the baton. Facing the wrong direction as she waits,

Paula is stationary as Kathy approaches her. Using both hands, Paula grabs the baton from Kathy, who had to slow down to a snail's pace to transfer it. After looking at the baton for a moment, Paula then starts running. Mark yells out to Paula, "you have to start running before she gets there." They try a few more handoffs, only marginally improving with each subsequent try.

With the meet starting soon, Eddie, Mark, Kathy, Paula, and Tessa have a seat with the rest of the team. Mr. Frazier grins and tells Mark, "I've finally got you figured out. I know what that was all about." Mark tells Mr. Frazier, "watch the look on their faces when the girls run. It's going to be good." Mark sits back, and thinks about what else he can do today to distract the other runners. Eddie, Mark, and Kathy will be running the 40-yard dash in just a moment. Kathy is hoping to do really well.

In the bleachers today are Eddie's and Kathy's parents, who are sitting together. Eddie's mother, Nina, sees Mark's parents walk in. Nina waves to them and asks Mark's parents to join them. Kathy's mother, Chloë, tells everyone, "I'm so excited because this is Kathy's first track meet! I hope she does well!" Nina reassures Chloë, telling her, "she'll do fine. Eddie tells me Katarina is really fast." Chloë has no idea of the athletic abilities of her daughter, but she is about to find out.

Paula's parents walk in and, looking around, they are amazed at what they see. They, too, want to watch their daughter's first track meet. Paula steps away from the team for a moment to say hello to her parents. Paula introduces her parents to Mark's parents, who she saw sitting on the bleachers earlier. Paula's and Kathy's parents already know each other, since Kathy and Paula have known each other since kindergarten. Paula's parents have a seat, and join the group.

Meanwhile, the coaches of the opposing teams are paying close attention, watching as their opponent's warm up. After watching Kathy, Paula, and Tessa warm up, the Riverdale coach, Mr. Lyons, confides with the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, telling him, "it looks like Frazier is down to the bottom of the barrel this year." The Centerville coach replies, "yeah, it sure looks like that. Frazier has this awesome arena, but it doesn't look like he has much of a team this year."

The Riverdale coach, Mr. Lyons, mentions to Mr. Ruff, "did you see that girl during the handoff? She started to run only after she received the baton!" The Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, replies, "no. I missed that. You can't be serious!" The Riverdale coach responds, "sadly, I am." The Centerville coach informs the Riverdale coach, "one of my sprinters tells me that the girls trip over themselves when they leave the blocks." The Riverdale coach laughs, and replies, "I'll be watching. I really want to see

that!" They both go back to their teams, thinking they will have an easy meet. It appears Mark has already scored a few points against the opponents.

The Meet Announcer makes the call for the 40-yard dash contestants, telling them to meet at the starting line. There will be two preliminary heats. The fastest six times will compete in the 40-yard dash final, which will be held a little later.

Mark spots McCutchen gathering with the runners, who apparently is fast enough to be a sprinter this year. Eddie and Kathy are in the first heat. Mark is in the second heat, along with McCutchen. Before the race begins, Mark tells Kathy in a way that everyone can hear, "just try not to finish last and you'll do good. Remember, this is your first race. You've only been running for a few days." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "remember to watch the Starter's foot at the other end of the track." Eddie has noticed that, when the Starter's foot begins to move to press the foot-operated buzzer, the buzzer is imminent.

The first heat of runners get behind the blocks. The Starter makes the announcement, "on your marks." Ready to run in her first high school meet, Kathy is all excited and filled with adrenaline. This is what she has been dreaming of and waiting for. The Starter announces, "set." The runners are all motionless. Kathy, watching the Starter's foot 40 yards away, is set and ready to go. The Starter hits the buzzer, and the runners are off.

Leaving the blocks, Kathy introduces herself to everyone in the arena with her primal scream. Eddie takes an early lead, with Kathy right on his heels. Two of the runners turn and look at Kathy as she is running and, in doing so, lost enough time to lose the race early. Halfway, at 20 yards, Eddie is leading, with Kathy and two other runners vying for second place. As they approach the finish, to no one's surprise, Eddie crosses first. Kathy edges out the other two runners by a slim margin, taking second place in her heat. The two runners who finished in fifth and sixth place, distracted by someone with XX chromosomes, are out of the competition, and will not make the final. A few seconds after the finish, one of the coaches makes the inevitable comment to his runner, "you were beaten by a girl!" Eddie gives Kathy a hug, telling her, "you did awesome! You're going to be in the final!"

The Meet Announcer, wasting no time, tells the runners in the second heat to get ready. Mark looks over at McCutchen, asking him, "oh, so they're letting you sprint this year?" McCutchen stands tall, and replies, "yeah. I'm in the mid to upper five-second range now." Mark replies, "wow! That's really good! I ran that in sixth grade." McCutchen never

learns. He should have ignored Mark. Mark just whittled McCutchen, a high school student, down to the speed and skill level of a sixth grader.

The Starter announces, “on your marks.” McCutchen, again thrown off by Mark, is now doubting his credentials for even being on the team. The Starter announces, “set.” Mark’s eyes are on the Starter, 40 yards away, waiting for his foot to move. The runners are motionless, and the buzzer sounds.

Mark is clearly out of the blocks first, and quickly takes the lead. Halfway through the race, it is clear that Mark has no competition. McCutchen is keeping pace with two other runners, but there is no clear break from the pack. In last place are two runners who are so far behind, they shouldn’t have even been in this race. At the finish, Mark crosses first, and will clearly be in the final event. McCutchen, and the other two runners, finish in a distant second, third and fourth place. The last two runners are clearly out of the competition.

Mark joins Eddie and Kathy back at the bench. Kathy no longer has the liberty to walk around and talk with the officials as she did when she was a team assistant. She is waiting impatiently, along with Eddie and Mark, to see if she made the final. Knowing that Kathy is anxious, Mr. Frazier asks Wendy to go and find out who is in the final heat of the 40-yard dash. He points out an official, who is the Meet Clerk, and tells Wendy to specifically ask him. Wendy walks away with her clipboard, hoping she succeeds at her first officially assigned task as a team assistant. Wendy asks the Meet Clerk who is in the final for the 40-yard dash. The Meet Clerk cheerfully gives Wendy the names of all six finalists, much to her surprise.

Wendy returns with the information, and shows it to Mr. Frazier as he is watching another race in progress. Mr. Frazier is exhilarated that all three of his runners have made the final. He tells Wendy to give the news to the runners. Wendy is now all excited, and returns to the team bench. She tells Eddie, Mark, and Kathy that they are all in the final. Hearing the news, Kathy jumps up and down and cheers. The finalists give each other and Wendy high-fives. Kathy gives Wendy a hug, which was somewhat unexpected. Right then, Wendy decided she really likes her new job as a team assistant.

Mark also notices that McCutchen has also made the final. Mark will have about a half hour to think up a new and creative way of distracting McCutchen. Eddie, Mark, and Kathy will beat him anyway. Mark’s position is not to let the opportunity to distract McCutchen go to waste. Besides, any erosion of McCutchen’s confidence will certainly carry over to future meets.

After a few more events, the call is made by the Meet Announcer for the 40-yard dash final. Kathy looks at Eddie, telling him, "wish me luck!" Eddie replies, "good luck but, with your skill, you won't need it." Eddie, Mark, and Kathy head to the starting line, along with Mr. Frazier. Eddie tells Kathy, "if you're behind me, just think that you're chasing me, like we do at the beach." Kathy tells Eddie, "who knows? You might just be behind me." Eddie replies, "then, I guess I'll be carrying you a whole lot more." When they get to the starting line, Eddie, the top seed, is in lane three. Mark, the second seed, is in lane four, and Kathy, the fourth seed, is in lane two. McCutchen is in lane one, which is a good sign that he is expected to lose.

Just before the race starts, Mark comments to McCutchen, "so, it looks like you made the final." McCutchen should have just ignored Mark, but he doesn't. McCutchen asks Mark, "when did you get girls on your team?" Mark replies, "a few days ago. Watch out, though, because sometimes she can't stay in her lane. She's caused a few collisions on the track in the past few days at practice. One of the guys she ran into is out with a broken leg." Kathy is running next to McCutchen. McCutchen now has one more thing to contend with once the race is underway.

The Starter announces, "on your marks." Kathy reminds herself that she wants a medal, and she is going to try her hardest to get one. She wants to wear her own medal around her neck come Monday morning. The Starter announces, "set." Kathy is the first one to get set, carefully watching the Starter's foot at the finish line along with Eddie and Mark. The buzzer sounds, and the 40-yard dash final is underway.

Kathy anticipated the buzzer well, and is off to a great start. As Kathy leaves the blocks, her primal scream distracts some of the runners. Several of them momentarily turn to glance at her. Eddie and Mark, however, are now accustomed to Kathy's primal scream. At ten yards into the race, Eddie, Mark, and Kathy are in the lead. McCutchen, in fifth place, was severely distracted by Kathy. Halfway through the race, Eddie is in the lead, and Mark is in second place. Kathy, in third place, has a runner on her heels who wants to supplant her. Kathy pays him no attention, and chases Eddie. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, with Mark taking second place. Kathy and the other runner fight it out for third place. Kathy and the runner who has been chasing her down cross the finish line in what appears to be a tie, as a photograph of the finish is taken.

Kathy does not know where she placed. Her eyes were straight ahead, where they should have been, so she was completely unaware of where she finished. Mr. Frazier, Eddie, Mark, and Kathy stand around, waiting for the decision. The fight for third place was so close that not even Mr. Frazier could tell who earned the bronze medal. The Timekeepers examine the photographic evidence carefully. Eddie tells Kathy, "it must

have really been close. They're all talking about it and looking at the photographs." Kathy is very reserved, waiting to hear the decision.

After some deliberation, the officials come to a decision. The Meet Announcer finally makes the announcement, "in the 40-yard dash final, in first place, running for Northside, Edward Bogenskaya. In second place, running for Northside, Mark Svoboda. In third place, also running for Northside, Katarina Karakova." After hearing her name, Kathy cheers uncontrollably, jumping up and down. Jumping up onto Eddie's hips, Kathy exclaims to Eddie, "I got my own medal! I got my own medal!" Eddie is so happy for Kathy. She has been looking forward to this for a long time.

While the team is celebrating, the other coaches examine the photographic evidence. Wanting to know how close the race was, Mr. Frazier walks over and also takes a look. The Riverdale coach, Mr. Lyons, comments to Mr. Frazier, "well, if she wasn't a girl, we would have won." Mr. Frazier questions him, asking, "what makes you say that?" The Riverdale coach explains, "her breasts crossed the finish line ahead of our guy's chest. If she was a guy, and didn't have breasts, she would have taken fourth place." Mr. Frazier laughs, telling the Riverdale coach, "it sounds like it's time for you to recruit some women!"

Mr. Frazier congratulates the three medalists, giving special attention to Kathy, who placed in her first event of her first meet. Eddie, Kathy, and Mark then head back to the team bench. The whole team congratulates Kathy on winning third place. Eddie and Mark are left out of the limelight, but they prefer that the attention be paid to Kathy. Paula and Barbara both give Kathy a hug. The rest of the team, seeing Kathy's victory, gets highly motivated. The energy level of the team rises tremendously.

Braden, Zaino, Hoffer, and Tessa, who are on the track, are preparing to run the 4 by 220 relay. When they get the news that Kathy took third place, Braden starts ranting, "it's our turn to kick ass! Bring it on! I'm ready! Bring it on!" Tessa's confidence rises tremendously after hearing of Kathy's success. Tessa now has her hopes set on a medal too.

The 4 by 220 relay gets underway, with Zaino leading off. Zaino procures an early lead, handing off to Tessa. The handoff goes well, and Tessa maintains the lead during her leg. As Tessa hands off to Hoffer, she knows that her relay team just might win the gold medal. Tessa thinks that, if Jimmy can hold on to the lead, no one will beat Braden, who is their anchor. Hoffer hands off to Braden, and it's all over. Zaino, Tessa, and Hoffer all have an early celebration, knowing that, with Braden having a fifteen-second lead, they have won the gold medal. Braden passes the last place runner, and crosses the finish line, taking the gold medal in the

event. The relay team returns to the bench, with Tessa ecstatic that she won a gold medal.

As the meet progresses, Mr. Frazier is pleased with the team's progress. Northside has taken the gold medal in every event thus far. The Riverdale coach, Mr. Lyons, mentions to the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, "where in the world does Frazier find these kids?" The Centerville coach replies, "I thought last year was bad but, this year, it looks like it's going to be a lot worse." Embarrassed by his team's poor performance, the Riverdale coach says, "and, those girls! They're kicking our ass." With the one-mile run about to begin, they haven't seen anything yet.

For Northside, Mitchell and Jeff Davis are hoping to keep last year's winning streak alive. Barbara, who will be running with them, is not about to settle for anything but first place today. The Starter tells the milers to get ready. Twelve runners will be in the field running the eight-lap race. The higher seeded runners are assigned to the inside starting positions, and the lower seeded runners the outside positions. Mitchell, the top seed according to last year's statistics, is assigned the inside position. Since there are no prior statistics on Barbara, she is unfortunately assigned a position on the outside.

The Starter announces, "everyone get into position," giving them a few seconds to focus their attention. The Starter announces, "set," followed in two seconds by the buzzer. During the first 100 yards, the runners all maneuver for position. They all hope to fall into a place where they are comfortable for the beginning of the race. After the first lap, Barbara is in the lead, with Mitchell right on her heels. A pack of runners has developed 20 yards behind them. No one else has broken from that pack yet. Barbara and Mitchell continue to widen their lead on the second lap.

The coaches congregate together as they watch the race unfold. The Riverdale coach, referring to Barbara, asks Mr. Frazier, "where in the world did you find her?" Mr. Frazier replies, "she was my team assistant for a few years." While Mr. Frazier is talking to the Riverdale coach, the coach of the Madison team tells the Centerville coach, "we come here every year and Frazier kicks our ass." Every team out there kicks Madison's ass. Madison's coach was just looking for compassion. The Centerville coach replies, "Frazier's always got a good team. I don't know where he finds his talent. You've got to hand it to him. He's done a great job over the past few years."

Back on the track, Barbara has taken a significant lead. Halfway through the race, Mitchell is still keeping pace with Barbara. There is a lot of talk on the benches about this race, with many of the athletes expressing that they are glad they are not on the track right now. On the Northside bench, Kathy, Paula, and Tessa are cheering for Barbara.

Braden exclaims, “we’re kicking ass! We’ve kicked every ass that has stepped on that track so far! We ain’t stopping now!”

During the last two laps, Barbara has no signs of slowing her pace. In fact, she is picking up the pace a little. She wants to deliver her best time so that, in future races, she will be assigned a better starting position. Mitchell falls slightly behind Barbara, but no one is within reach of catching him.

While Barbara is on her last lap, the Riverdale coach returns to his bench, telling his team, “I’ve had enough! Will someone please get out there and win something? It’s bad enough that Northside is kicking our ass, but their girls are kicking our ass too!” They might as well get used to it. This is only the beginning. Riverdale, however, has a choice. They can either step up their game, or continue to go home empty handed. The coach complaining to the team does not improve the runner’s aerobic capacity or speed. Training the team might be a better option than throwing a temper tantrum.

As Barbara approaches the finish line, the whole Northside team cheers for her. Barbara crosses first, with Mitchell a few seconds behind, taking second place. Barbara and Mitchell move off the track, and watch as the rest of the field begins their last lap. Taking third place is Jeff Davis, who just edged out a runner from Riverdale. The rest of the pack crosses the finish line, one by one, but it doesn’t matter. The race was over literally a minute ago. Mr. Frazier congratulates Barbara, telling her, “congratulations! That was, by far, the best mile I’ve seen in a long time! That was a great run!”

On the bleachers, Kathy’s father, Alexander, seeing Barbara’s awesome finish, mentions to everyone, “she’s really good. I suspect I will be seeing her at State.” Kathy’s mother, Chloë, asks, “who is that who won?” Alexander replies, “that’s Barbara, one of Kathy’s friends. She’s a senior.” Chloë did not recognize Barbara in her track uniform. Chloë tells everyone, “I can’t wait for the relay race. Katarina and Paula are both running in it.” Nina tells Chloë, “Eddie tells me they run good together, and that they are going to win.” They’ll have to wait a while to find out. The 4 by 440 relay is the last event of the day.

After all the other events are completed, the call for the last event of the day, the 4 by 440 relay, finally comes. Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula head to the starting line. Erika hands Mark the baton, which is a relief to McCutchen, the Centerville anchor. This means McCutchen will not have to run against Mark. He will run against Eddie instead, as if that’s going to be any better.

McCutchen, attempting his own style of psychological warfare, tells his relay team in a voice loud enough for everyone nearby to hear, "we've got this wrapped up. We're up against girls." One of McCutchen's team members points out to him, "yeah, well, one of those girls kicked your ass in the 40-yard dash earlier." McCutchen replies to his teammate, "yeah, I know. But, this is a 440." Mark and Eddie overhear McCutchen's verbal exchange with his teammate. Mark mentions to Eddie, "McCutchen's own team is working him over. It looks like I get a break today."

The teams are instructed to take their lanes and get ready. The Starter tells the runners, "on your marks." The Madison runner takes more time than expected getting into the blocks. Fifteen seconds later, the Starter announces, "set." The buzzer sounds, and Mark is out of the blocks faster than any of the competition.

Mark is not playing games today. He is running to win a gold medal. Not just for himself though, he is running for Paula's gold medal. Mark already has quite a collection of his own medals from last year. Into the second lap, Mark is in the lead, with Centerville in second place. Riverdale is in third place, with Madison in fourth place. Fourth place is not too much to brag about when only four teams are competing. McCutchen, seeing Paula on the track, tells his teammate who will be up against her, "it looks like you'll take the lead during your leg."

Mark passes the baton to Paula, who takes off running like she is running for gold. Kathy is paying close attention as Paula not only maintains her position, but widens the lead. After Paula's first lap, Kathy gets on the track, anxiously waiting as Paula is on the back straightaway. Coming out of the curve, Paula hands off to Kathy, which goes flawlessly. Heads turn as Kathy lets out her primal scream after receiving the baton.

After seeing Paula's handoff to Kathy, the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, mentions to the Riverdale coach, Mr. Lyons, "it looks like they've developed impeccable handoff skills in the last few hours. Frazier must have taken a few trips to the Amazon to find these women." Northside and Centerville are rival teams in every sport, which explains Mr. Ruff's comment.

Kathy, like Paula, also widens the lead, as Centerville loses ground. The bad news is the Riverdale runner is gaining on Centerville. On lap two, the Riverdale runner passes the Centerville runner. He now has his sites on passing Kathy. Kathy is not about to let that happen. As McCutchen enters the track, Mark tells him, "good luck, junior. It looks like you'll need it." Kathy sprints to the transition zone, where Eddie is waiting for her. The Riverdale runner slows his pace significantly, burning out too early. He has lost all hope of catching Kathy.

Kathy hands off to Eddie, and Eddie takes off in the search for gold. Kathy walks off the track, and lies on the ground, catching her breath. As she is laying there, she repeats with every breath, “we won! We won! We won!” She stands up just in time to watch Eddie bring home the gold. Eddie crosses the finish line, and the whole team cheers. Paula gives Mark a hug, as she is jumping up and down. Mr. Frazier congratulates the relay team, giving a high-five to everyone. Riverdale takes second place. Centerville, who expected to win, takes third place.

Before the awards ceremony, the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, approaches Mr. Frazier, asking a favor, “hey, let me in on it the next time you head down to the Amazon. I want to pick up a few of those women too.” Mr. Frazier, in a very serious and convincing tone, replies to the rival team’s coach, “only two of them are from the Amazon. The other two are from Paradise Island. I picked them up earlier this year. It was hard to get a visa for the tall blonde one because no one knows her birthday. But, I managed to get her in anyway.” Mr. Ruff, stating the obvious, mentions, “when she takes off, she really screams.” Mr. Frazier replies, “they do that down in the Amazon. It’s common.” Mr. Ruff took Mr. Frazier very seriously. Apparently, the Centerville coach has never heard of Wonder Woman and Paradise Island. From then on, Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa would be known to some of the competitors as Frazier’s Amazon women.

After a brief pause at the end of the meet, the Meet Announcer tells everyone that the awards ceremony will begin in five minutes. Since the arena is full with spectators today, the Meet Announcer tells the runners to assemble at their designated team area. Mr. Frazier informs his team that they have won a considerable number of medals today. He instructs the team to act in a very sportsmanlike manner when receiving their awards.

To both the left and right of the podium stand two coaches, spread out in the center of the oval track. Erika and Wendy stand with Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde to the far left side of the oval. Standing behind the podium, the Meet Announcer addresses the runners, saying, “when I call your name, I want you to walk up to the platform. A meet official will then drape you with your medal. You will then stand behind your coach after you receive your award.” The group of athletes standing behind their coach is evidence of the coach’s accomplishments for the meet.

After opening the ceremony, the Meet Announcer starts with the 40-yard dash. The Announcer introduces the winners, stating, “in first place, running for Northside, Edward Bogenskaya.” Eddie steps up to the platform and stands on the first place tier. The announcer continues, “in second place, running for Northside, Mark Svoboda.” Mark steps up and stands on the second place tier. The announcer concludes, “and, in third

place, also running for Northside, Katarina Karakova.” As Kathy steps up to the third place tier, the crowd goes wild. Even some of the opposing team members find it hard not to clap for Kathy. The medals are draped around the winners’ necks as the crowd cheers. After receiving their awards, the medalists step down and stand behind their coach.

The ceremony moves along quickly. Bobby B. takes the gold medal in the shot-put, with John “No Neck” Beck taking the silver. Barbara takes the gold medal in the mile, with Mitchell taking the silver, and Jeff Davis taking the bronze. Braden takes the gold in the 440-yard dash and in a few other events. Hoffer, with the upset of the day, took the silver medal in the 440-yard dash. Tessa won her gold medal in the 4 by 220 relay. Barbara takes the gold medal in the half mile, Mitchell takes the silver, and Johnson takes the bronze. Mark took the gold medal in the 220-yard dash, with Eddie taking the silver medal, and Paula taking the bronze. All in all, Northside won well more than half the medals, taking the gold medal in every event. As the medals are distributed, fear is struck into the other teams.

The Meet Announcer introduces the winners of the last event, “first place in the 4 by 440 relay goes to Northside. Running for Northside is Mark Svoboda, Paula Giovani, Katarina Karakova, and Edward Bogenskaya.” The crowd cheers, as the relay team steps up to the first place tier. Riverdale took second place, and Centerville took third place. As an official drapes the medals around the winners’ necks, a tear of happiness flows down Kathy’s cheek. Kathy and Paula are very excited that they won a gold medal in their first track meet, and cheer wildly, unable to contain their excitement. They all step down, and join their other team members behind their coach.

After the ceremony, Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula walk over to meet their parents. A celebration ensues, with the girls showing off their medals to everyone around. Kathy suggests that everyone go out to the Italian restaurant for a late lunch. It is not hard for everyone to figure out why. Kathy still has not had a pizza since Christmas Eve. Paula seconds Kathy’s motion, and no one seems to object. The parents find it difficult to argue with their daughters who have a few medals draped around their necks. So, it is decided that everyone will meet at the Italian restaurant, known to Kathy and her friends as the pizzeria.

When they arrive, Joe yells out from behind the counter, “you guys won so many medals, you’re giving them away to your girls now!” Kathy yells back, “hey Joe! We won these medals ourselves! We’re on the team now!” Joe comes out from behind the counter to take a look at the girl’s medals. Joe congratulates Kathy and Paula, and gives them both a hug. But, it doesn’t stop there. Joe gets out a camera, and takes a picture of Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula with their medals around their necks. Joe

tells them he is going to have the picture enlarged, and that he's going to hang it on the wall. After the photo shoot, the parents suggest they sit in the formal seating side of the restaurant. No one objects, even though Kathy prefers the informal pizzeria side of the establishment.

When Arianna, the waitress, arrives to take the order, Kathy, ordering for herself and Eddie, tells her, "we'll have a discus with shot-puts. And, we want to split a salad, but we don't want any drill bits on it. Oh, and some of those javelins on the side with some garlic butter." The parents look at Kathy like she is a bit crazy, but the waitress knows exactly what Kathy meant, and writes down the order. Arianna, having full understanding of Kathy's order, moves on to the next person. It is everyone else who now looks crazy because they didn't understand Kathy. After the waitress takes everyone's order, the conversation again shifts to the meet.

During lunch, Kathy's father expresses that he did not know that Kathy was so highly competitive. Until recently, neither did Kathy. At the University, Dr. Karakova usually works with the best of the best, not realizing his daughter is right up there with them.

Eddie's father expresses that he is just glad that Eddie got to run in the meet today. This, of course, brought up the issue surrounding why Eddie potentially would have had to sit out during this meet. Dr. Karakova mentions that Mr. Crum has been a problem for some time, and that the school would be better off without him. Dr. Karakova tells Eddie's father that if there are any future problems with Mr. Crum, go directly to Mr. Zunde. They all have a good laugh rehashing the events surrounding Eddie's potential disciplinary action, especially Mr. Crum's broken desk.

After lunch, the athletes are all sleepy, and need a nap. They had to wake up earlier than usual for today's meet. Paula's father suggests that they are sleepy because they ate so much pizza. Mark points out that Paula didn't even run a mile today, so she cannot possibly be tired from running. The parents all agree that they should attend the meets more often. Just seeing their kids compete and win bring joy to their hearts. But, since everyone is tired, they all go home for the afternoon. Eddie and Kathy will meet up after her nap.

While Kathy is taking a nap, Eddie takes a trip to the future to sell some more gold that he has accumulated. Today, Eddie takes several trips to the future, traveling to quite a few different dates in order to get the job done all at once. On one of his trips, Eddie also stops by an army surplus store where he buys four waterproof ammunition boxes. His plan is to bury his money and gold in the back yard. The ammunition box would make the perfect container to keep everything safe. On another

trip, Eddie stops by a jewelry store, picking up two Swiss-made stopwatches made by the Marathon Watch Company.

All of that traveling has left Eddie a bit tired himself. Eddie recalls that, when he travels through the portal into the future, no time has actually elapsed when he returns. Eddie thinks to himself that, if he goes to the future and takes a nap, he will recover and be ready for the rest of the day. Eddie picks a random date in the Spring. When he arrives, he gets something more to eat at a delicatessen. He then rides to a nearby park, locks his bicycle to a tree, and takes a nap. Eddie uses his handlebar bag that contains the money he got from selling the gold as a pillow, and sleeps in the park for about two hours. When he wakes up, he returns to the portal, and returns to his time, finding himself all refreshed.

Eddie and Kathy meet up later in the day, both energetic after their naps. Eddie asks Kathy, "how was your nap?" Kathy replies, "it was good. I can't believe I slept for so long!" Kathy asks Eddie, "so, what did you do when I slept away the afternoon?" Eddie explains, "I took a few trips to the future to sell gold, and put in quite a few miles. I needed a nap too. So, I went into the future, got a bite to eat, and went to the park and took a two-hour nap. And then I came back." Kathy exclaims, "wow! You got all that done, and a nap?" Eddie replies, "yeah. And, then I went home and worked out a little."

Listening to Eddie describe his afternoon, and comparing it with hers, the wheels in Kathy's head begin to turn. Kathy reasons to herself that Eddie got a free two-hour nap because time didn't pass when he had his. Kathy's nap cost her the afternoon. Kathy tells Eddie, "hey! You're on to something here!" Eddie asks, "oh yeah? What?" Kathy explains, "you went into the future, and took a nap, but no time elapsed in our world! So, you got a free nap. And, not to mention, you got all that stuff done."

Eddie casually mentions, "yeah, I can see that now. That's how I got your Christmas present." Kathy asks, "oh yeah? How is that? Tell me." Eddie explains, "I went to the future to sell some gold, and I found the necklace in the store. I bought it, but they said it will take a week to engrave it. So, I rode back to the portal, and went back into the portal with a date one week later. I rode to the store again, and picked it up."

Kathy thinks for a moment, and tells Eddie, "maybe that's why we can all run so fast. We get free workouts. Well, sort of free. Look at it this way. If we can go into the portal, train for three months, we will come back a lot faster than we are now. And, no time would have elapsed, so we'd be three months ahead of the game. But, we've been doing that little by little over the Summer, so we get more training in each day than

anyone else can. I can't believe it took me so long to see this!" Eddie replies, "yeah! I get it! I can see where you're going with this."

Kathy, deep in thought, suggests to Eddie, "you know, we can go into the portal, take a cruise around the world for two months, and return to our time. No one would even notice that we were gone. We could do that like right now if we wanted to." Eddie asks, "do they have gyms on cruise ships?" Kathy replies, "they sure do. My parents went on a cruise two years ago, and they had a workout area, a spa, lots of good food, and a pool. Well, it was a tiny pool. And, there was a jogging track on one of the decks that went around the whole ship." Eddie replies, "I think I see a vacation in our future."

Kathy mentions, "I wonder if Mark and Paula would want to go." Eddie replies, "yeah. Mark would for sure." Kathy thinks about this for a while. Eddie lets her think, as he sits back to relax. Kathy, deep in thought, asks Eddie, "do you have a passport?" Eddie replies, "yeah." Kathy tells Eddie, "I'm going to plan this out. We are going on vacation, Edward Bogenskaya!" Kathy now has a plan. There is a vacation in her and Eddie's future.

For the rest of the day, all Kathy can think about are the many possibilities of what can be done through the portal. Even though it's cold outside, Kathy and Eddie go on a bicycle ride just for fun. Kathy suggests they ride by Paula's house. When they arrive, they find Mark visiting with her. Kathy wastes no time telling Paula and Mark of her vacation plans. Paula and Mark are all in on the plan. Kathy and Paula will figure out the details later. For now, they all go on a leisurely ride together.

When Monday morning arrives, Eddie and Kathy get to school early, and hang out around the lobby. Kathy is wearing her own medals today, proudly displaying both that she won this past weekend. Braden arrives, wearing all of his medals from last year along with the ones he just earned. Eddie tells Braden, "you'd better be careful, bro. You're going to sprain your neck with all that gold and silver hanging from it." Braden replies, "it's my neck workout for the day. I'll be increasing the weight soon." Bobby B. arrives next, also wearing his medal.

In a while, the whole tribe is assembled. Kathy suggests, "hey, let's go stand outside of the office." Paula asks, "why?" Kathy replies, "just so Mr. Crum can see all of our medals!" Barbara wastes no time, telling everyone, "yeah! Let's go and do that!" Barbara is no fan of Mr. Crum. They all walk to the other end of the lobby, and hang out near the administration area.

The school secretary, Mrs. Marlowe, remembering the incident between Eddie and Chuckie from last week, announces over the public address system, "Mr. Crum, please report to your office." Mr. Crum walks up, seeing the athletes loitering outside the office with their medals around their necks. Mr. Crum walks into the office, and asks Mrs. Marlowe, "what's the problem?" Mrs. Marlowe replies, "I just saw them all standing there together, and thought it could spell trouble." Mr. Crum tells her, "I'll get to the bottom of this." Mr. Crum hastily rushes out the door to confront the athletes.

Mr. Crum approaches the athletes, intending to get them to disperse. Mr. Crum, however, runs into Mr. Zunde, who just walked up. Mr. Zunde is again congratulating the athletes for the fine meet this weekend. Seeing Mr. Crum's anguish when he walked out of the office, Mr. Zunde tells him, "Mr. Crum, the track team did very well this weekend. Come over and take a look at their medals." Mr. Zunde could not pass up the opportunity to throw Mr. Crum under the bus.

Mr. Crum, who is between a rock and a hard place, reluctantly takes a look at the athlete's medals. Barbara is the first one to shove it in his face, telling the principal, "look! I won the gold medal in the mile, the half mile, and in the mile medley relay!" Kathy and Paula also pile it on, both exclaiming, "we won gold in the 4 by 440 relay!" Mr. Crum tells them, "congratulations," and moves on to some irrelevant task just to get out of their presence.

Mr. Zunde tells the team members, "congratulations again! You all did well this weekend. I'll see all of you at practice this afternoon." The students go to their classes, and Mr. Zunde goes to teach a weight training class. And, Mr. Crum goes back to running his pussy factory.

The team continues to practice every day after school. Morale is at an all-time high, which is a welcome change compared with the previous year when Mahoney was constantly dragging the team spirit down. As the season moves on, the team wins every meet and takes first place in nearly every event. All the meets and medals they are winning just fuels the fire to win even more. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara now all have their own medal collection. More and more students are even now attending the meets.

Before practice one afternoon, Barbara tells her friends she has an announcement to make. Barbara is keeping her announcement a secret until the entire tribe is present. When they all enter the arena, they gather around Barbara. Once the tribe is all together, Barbara tells the group, "I got accepted to the University in the Exercise Science program!" Everyone cheers for her, just like they would if she just won a race. Barbara tells them, "but, that's not all the good news." She now has everyone's full attention. Barbara tells them, "I also got an internship, and

I get to return here next year and work with the team!" Everyone gives Barbara a high-five, and is glad that she'll be back next year to be with them. Paula asks her, "where are you going?" Barbara replies, "to the State University," referring to the State University that is a few miles away where Kathy's father is a professor.

Mr. Frazier walks in and has the team assemble on the bleachers. Once everyone is present, Mr. Frazier opens by telling everyone, "I have a few announcements before we begin today." Some of the team members already know what one of the announcements will be. Mr. Frazier announces, "first, Barbara is going to the State University next year, and will return to work with the team as an intern. She will be the team's assistant coach." The team applauds, giving her an early warm welcome for her return next year.

Mr. Frazier continues, announcing, "I also have the invitee list for this year's State competition. Listen up. Here's the list. Eddie, the 40-yard dash, and 4 by 440 relay. Mark, the 220-yard dash and the 4 by 440 relay. Braden, the 440-yard dash and the mile medley relay. Johnson, the mile medley relay. Barbara, the mile and the mile medley relay. Kathy, the 4 by 440 relay. Mitchell, the mile and the mile medley relay. Paula, the 4 by 440 relay. Hoffer, Tessa, Zaino, and Bell, the 4 by 220 relay. And, while you guys are running during every meet, Bobby B. is off to the side, often unnoticed, tossing the shot-put. This year, Bobby B. will be tossing the shot-put at State." The whole team cheers, as everyone is happy to hear the good news.

Mr. Frazier tells everyone, "I have one more announcement to make. I never thought in all my life that I would have to make an announcement like this. In fact, I don't even know how to say this. During the first meet of the year, Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, mentioned that he thought the four women on this team came from the Amazon. I told him that only two of the women are from the Amazon and the other two are from Paradise Island. I told Mr. Ruff that I actually traveled there to pick up the women myself!" Mr. Frazier then exclaims, "and, Mr. Ruff actually believed me!" The whole team starts to laugh, with the girls laughing hysterically. After the laughter dies down, Mr. Frazier continues, "but, it doesn't stop there! I have found out that this rumor has spread throughout the entire State!" The laughter rises again, and is slow to die down.

Mr. Frazier tells the team, "I will let the girls decide whether they want to keep this rumor alive, or whether they want us, as a team, to deny it." Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa look at each other, and take less than a second to unanimously decide to keep the rumor alive. Barbara, speaking for the women, yells back to Mr. Frazier, "keep it alive!" The guys all cheer as the girls all flex their biceps showing off their guns. The girls decide among themselves that Kathy and Paula are from Paradise Island, and

Barbara and Tessa are from the Amazon. Eddie mentions to those around him, "I knew there was a reason we let them in the tribe." Mark is already thinking of how he'll use the rumor to gain an advantage during a race.

The team begins practice, with everyone seemingly overly energetic after Mr. Frazier finished addressing the team. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde step aside and talk for a while as the team is practicing. Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, "can you believe that Mr. Ruff actually thought I was serious?" Mr. Zunde explains, "actually, yes I can. A few years ago, during one of the meets, I picked up the shot-put and threw it a few times before the meet. Matt Wood was a freshman back then, and I think it was his first meet. I was showing him a few secrets to the technique. Mr. Ruff asked Matt if I was on the team. Matt misunderstood his question, and told him 'yes.' Matt thought he was asking whether I was with the team. Mr. Ruff complained to the Field Judge, telling him that I looked too old to be a student." Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, "I'll give you twenty bucks if you can make Ruff admit there's a tooth fairy." Mr. Zunde laughs, telling Mr. Frazier, "hey, it's free entertainment. You just can't make this stuff up." Mr. Frazier then goes and works with the sprinters, and Mr. Zunde takes Bobby B. and the shot-put crew to the weight room.

After practice, Eddie and the tribe meet up for a few minutes, chatting about Mr. Frazier's worldly travels in search of women who can run fast. Erika asks Eddie, "what's all this about a tribe anyway?" Eddie explains to Erika, "it began last year, during a football class in gym. Me, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. were slaughtering the opponents. Ambrosini, who was on the other team, yelled at me, and asked me, 'what kind of tribe are you running?' Since then, we've been known as 'the tribe.'" Erika asks, "so, who's in this tribe?" Kathy informs Erika, "Eddie, me, Mark, Paula, Johnson, Barbara, Braden, Wendy, Bobby B., Mitchell, and I guess now, Hoffer and Tessa."

Barbara asks Erika, "so, do you want to join our tribe?" Kathy tells Erika, "sure, go ahead! Join our tribe!" Paula mentions, "we can have the initiation after we get dressed." Erika asks, "initiation? What's that?" Paula replies, "yeah! Initiation. You have to like pizza to be in the tribe. We can all go out and get pizza." Kathy quickly responds, and exclaims, "yeah, pizza!" Hoffer tells Erika, "sure, come with us. It will be fun." Erika agrees, and tells them, "sure, I'll come. I can eat pizza." On the way out of the arena, Erika tells Tessa, "I had no idea what this initiation stuff was." Tessa tells Erika, "they just play around a lot, and have fun. You'll see."

On the way out of the school, Kathy mentions, "you guys were running kind of slow today." Mark replies, "no, we weren't." Paula, knowing exactly where Kathy is going with this, replies, "oh yeah, you were! You guys really need to work out more." Mark looks at Eddie, telling him, "I

should have seen this coming.” Hoffer asks, “seen what coming?” Braden informs Hoffer, “you shouldn’t have asked that question. It looks like tonight is gonna be your initiation too. You were never initiated. You’re really going to get yours tonight.”

Eddie picks up Kathy, putting her on his shoulders. Mark, Johnson, and Braden also put their girlfriends on their shoulders. Mitchell also picks up his girlfriend, Amber Amy, who is also known as the “two first name girl,” and places her on his shoulders. Braden looks at Hoffer, telling him, “what are you waiting for? This is your initiation.” Hoffer then puts Tessa on his shoulders, and they all head to the pizzeria.

As they begin walking, Erika asks, “hey! So, how come I have to walk?” Kathy replies, “wow! Erika fits in really good!” Bobby B. tells Erika, “hey, I’ll carry you.” Erika replies, “sure.” Bobby B. picks up Erika, effortlessly lifting her overhead, and places her on his shoulders. Eddie exclaims, “pizza in one mile!” A bit concerned, Hoffer asks, “one mile? Are you serious?” Braden answers Hoffer, telling him, “yeah! This is the real workout. The last two hours was just the warm-up.” Tessa was right. It didn’t take too long for Erika to discover the playful nature of the tribe.

While they are walking down the road, the girls wave at the people in the cars. Many people wave back and honk their horns. Halfway there, Hoffer mentions, “hey! This is a really good workout.” Eddie replies, “this is how we get fast.” Bobby B. laughs and exclaims, “what? You guys call this a workout?” The shot doc just spent the afternoon doing bench presses and squats in the weight room. Erika, sitting on his shoulders, is nothing compared to his usual workout. When they arrive at the pizzeria, Eddie tells Erika, “don’t forget to duck.” As usual, someone opens the door for them, and they walk in.

When they walk in, Erika mentions to Kathy, “hey! There’s your picture on the wall.” Kathy tells her, “yeah! I know! Joe took that after the 4-way meet earlier in the season.” Joe yells out from behind the counter, “what will it be, Kathy? A discus today?” Kathy replies, “yeah! But, no shot-puts. I want something else today.” Erika wonders what in the world that was all about. She’ll find out soon enough. Braden tells Hoffer, “you’d better get used to carrying her. It looks to me like Tessa was having way too much fun up there.” Hoffer has no complaint carrying Tessa on his shoulders. He really likes her.

Since they are a large group, Joe comes over and takes their order. Kathy, ordering for her and Eddie, tells Joe, “I want a discus with those little baby discus thingies on it. Oh, and some of those cut up javelins with garlic butter.” Puzzled about Kathy’s order, Erika asks Paula, “what was that?” Paula explains to Erika, “this goes back to last Summer. A discus is a pizza. The shot-puts are meatballs. The ‘baby discus thingies’

are pepperoni. And, get this. A javelin all cut up is a bread stick.” Erika laughs uncontrollably, knowing she has found the right group of friends. Paula mentions, “I think Kathy is going to rewrite the whole menu.”

While taking the orders, Joe comes to Bobby B. next. Bobby B., after his strenuous workout, does not order a pizza. Instead, Bobby B. chooses something from the menu with a lot more protein. Looking through the menu, Bobby B. puts together a dinner from a few side dishes. He tells Joe, “I’ll have spaghetti with extra sauce, and three breasts.” Erika interrupts, telling Bobby B., “I only have two.” It takes a second or two, but the group finally got Erika’s unusual sense of humor, which came as quite a shock to most of them.

After everyone places their order, Eddie remarks to Bobby B., “three breasts?” Bobby B. replies, “well, they’re small.” Erika replies, “hey now! There’s no need for that!” As everyone laughs, Kathy whispers to Paula, “this is going somewhere.” Paula whispers back, “believe it or not, I can see it this time.”

After dinner, everyone steps outside and talks for a few minutes. Each of the couples then walks home together, most of them going in different directions. Bobby B., who lives around the corner from Kathy, walks Erika home. Erika lives in the opposite direction as Bobby B. Paula, watching as Bobby B. and Erika walk away, whispers to Kathy, “yeah. I think you’re right. Bobby B. is walking Erika home.” Eddie, Kathy, Mark, Paula, Hoffer, and Tessa all head in the direction of the school. On the way, Paula mentions, “we are so lucky to have such a good group of friends.” Eddie mentions, “yeah. High school is a lot better than middle school was. Even getting suspended was kind of fun.” Kathy points out, “yeah, after it was all over.”

On the way home, Paula asks Kathy, “hey, did you finish the paper for history class yet?” Kathy replies, “oops. When is that due?” Paula informs her, “tomorrow.” Kathy tells everyone, “well, I have one paragraph done. It only has to be two or three pages. I guess I know what I’m doing tonight.” They come to the road where Mark and Paula turn to go to Paula’s house, so the couples go their own way.

When they get to Kathy’s house, Kathy tells Eddie, “I have to finish my history paper. This totally sucks.” Eddie suggests to Kathy, “I have some homework too. Maybe we can do it together.” Kathy agrees, telling Eddie, “yeah, that would make everything go a little better.” They go inside, and work on their homework. Even though they are in different grades, just being with each other makes the task of doing homework more bearable. They sit on the floor, with their books laying around, actually getting some homework done. Kathy and Eddie, just being with each other, make everything a lot better.

The next morning comes, and Eddie and Kathy walk to school together. When they arrive, since it is a little cold outside, they hang out in the school lobby. When Paula arrives, she asks Kathy, "so, did you get your paper done?" Kathy smiles, and replies, "I sure did. And, it's original, just like he asked." Paula asks, "can I read it? I'll let you read mine." Kathy says, "sure. But, you can't laugh at it." Hearing Kathy's response, Eddie knows there is something interesting about Kathy's history paper. Kathy and Paula exchange papers, and Eddie reads Kathy's paper along with Paula. The assignment for Kathy and Paula's history class was,

Choose a historical figure and give YOUR interpretation of their accomplishments. Do not give an interpretation formed by others, i.e., that which is found in encyclopedias and history books. Please be original. 2-3 pages.

Eddie and Paula read Kathy's paper, which reads,

Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer. He was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451 and died on May 20, 1506. They say Columbus was quite a skilled sailor, and sailed to Africa, other parts of Europe, and even Iceland. Columbus wanted to sail to the East. Sailing to the East was considered important because of the spice trade the Europeans carried out with Asia. The Italians thought he was crazy because he wanted to sail West to get to the East. Everyone was sure that he would sail off the edge of the Earth. The Italians tried to get rid of him, so he eventually moved to Spain.

The Spanish government was receptive to his new and innovative ideas. Just like the Italians, they also eventually found out that he was perhaps a bit crazy. After a while, Christopher Columbus became a real pain in the rear end. The Spanish tried everything they can to get rid of him. Even though they made many attempts at getting rid of him, they all failed.

In 1492, it got so bad that they decided to get rid of him any way they can. They gave Columbus three ships, the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. They did not care where he sailed to, and just wanted him to go away. The King rounded up a whole bunch of sailors who were just as crazy as Columbus to go on the voyage with him. The King of Spain thought that he could get rid of all of these crazy people in one fell swoop. The King was also secretly hoping that Columbus would sail off the edge of the world, and never come back.

Christopher Columbus sailed to the West to get to the East. He was trying to get to India. When they got to America, all of the sailors thought they were in India. They were so sure of themselves that they even called the native Americans “Indians.” The native Americans had no spices, they did not look like anyone from India, there were no ports for their ships, and there was certainly no one named Patel. You would think that just one person in the crew would have noticed that the land and the people did not resemble anything or anyone in India. But no, they all got it wrong. No wonder the King of Spain wanted to get rid of them. Columbus and his crew were not exactly the brightest bulbs on the tree.

Columbus returned to Spain with no spices from the East. Columbus also returned with a whole lot less people than he left with, and lost two ships along the way. The King, however, must have been sadly disappointed when Columbus returned. Since the King had more crazy people to get rid of, he gave Columbus seventeen ships for his next voyage. Why would the King send Columbus on a second voyage since the first one was a complete failure? Probably because there were no sanitariums to put the crazy people in back then. Unfortunately, after the second trip, Columbus returned again. He returned again after the third and fourth trips. It seemed to be totally impossible to get rid of this guy.

Finally, they named a country after him. They called it America. If Columbus actually discovered America, it would be called Columbia, not America. Columbia is in South America, a long way from North America. Just looking through history books, you might think that America was named after Amerigo Vespucci, and not Columbus. Columbus is obviously not as good as a sailor as history portrays him to be. As it turns out, research shows that Christopher Columbus probably never set foot in North America. But we still celebrate Columbus day, and still think this guy somehow discovered America. Only in his dreams.

Eddie and Paula try not to laugh, but they do anyway. Kathy really expected them to laugh. She actually thought her paper was funny. Kathy is proud of her work of art. Kathy tells Eddie and Paula, “you weren’t supposed to laugh.” Eddie tells Kathy, “you told Paula that she couldn’t laugh, but not me.” Kathy replies, “okay, that’s fair enough.” Eddie tells Kathy, “this is really great! I’d give you an A+!” Paula also tells her, “yeah, I agree. This is really good!”

A few of the other tribe members walk up, asking, “what’s so funny?” Paula replies, “Kathy’s paper, but you’re not allowed to laugh when you

read it.” Everyone now wants to read Kathy’s paper. They all think it is great. Kathy hopes the teacher also thinks it is great.

While everyone else is reading Kathy’s paper, Kathy reads Paula’s paper, which reads,

Benjamin Franklin was a statesman who helped found the country we now live in, known as The United States of America. He was born on January 17, 1706. Franklin is reported to have many jobs throughout his career. He was generally known as a Renaissance Man, which, at his time, was a very prestigious title.

On the political side of the arena, Benjamin Franklin was reported to be a Renaissance Man, as mentioned above, an author, a political theorist, a politician, a civil activist, a statesman, and a diplomat. On the scientific side, Franklin was known as a scientist, a physicist, and an inventor. Over his career, Franklin has also held several jobs. He held jobs as a printer, a postmaster, a newspaper editor, and a humorist. Franklin is even reported to be a musical composer but, today, no one really listens to anything he composed.

Looking at Franklin’s accomplishments, we can see that he got rich by publishing *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. It would have been better named *Rich Ben’s Almanack*, but it’s doubtful that anyone would buy a periodical with that name. Franklin also worked for the post office. He was probably so good at cancelling stamps and delivering mail, so he became the first Postmaster General. Or, maybe he got promoted to that position because he was too busy with all of the other things he was involved with. It’s likely everyone just tried to get him out of the way by giving him a pencil to push, kind of like a high school principal.

Benjamin Franklin is also credited with the discovery of electricity. One Summer day, Franklin flew a kite during a thunderstorm. The string was connected to a key in a jar. When lightning struck the kite, it traveled down the string into the key in the jar. Franklin must have been standing close by, and likely got struck by lightning. Flying a kite in a thunderstorm isn’t too bright of a thing to do. If he was so smart, he probably wouldn’t have done that.

Franklin also is quoted as saying *a penny saved is a penny earned*. When you think about it, that statement makes absolutely no sense at all. A penny saved can be stolen, found on the street, a gift, earned through working, or acquired in many different

ways. So, *a penny saved is a penny saved* would make much more sense.

But, let's be serious about this guy. No one can accomplish all that is attributed to Benjamin Franklin, and do it well. He, like many people today, probably had many people working under him, and he put his name on their work. But, he did accomplish a lot over various different disciplines. So, the Renaissance Man, Benjamin Franklin, is really today's equivalent of a jack of all trades and a master of none. But, that title wouldn't sound too good for someone whose name is on the Declaration of Independence.

Kathy tells Paula, "this is great! That's exactly what that guy really is! A jack of all trades and a master of none! You'll definitely get an A!" Now everyone wants to read Paula's paper, but the bell rings, so they all head to class. They will all meet again at practice later this afternoon.

With the State invitational meet right around the corner, the invitees participating in the meet practice every day. Mr. Frazier limits them to one pizza a week. If he said no pizza at all, they might just quit the team. Well, not really. They'll just make it up and have more pizza after the season is over.

On the track, the relay teams are performing much better than in the beginning of the season. Mitchell is slowly catching up to Barbara in the mile. Barbara's presence has caused Mitchell to seriously step up his game. Even the veterans Bell and Zaino are performing far better than expected this year.

When the day of the State invitational meet arrives, the team assembles in the early morning at the school. Although only a dozen of the team members made it to the State invitational meet, many of the other team members come to watch and cheer. They all take the bus together, even though the venue is only a few miles away. It is clear that team morale is at an all-time high.

When they arrive at the venue, many of them remember the awesomeness of the arena from last year. Mark teases Hoffer and Tessa, telling them that the track is horrible, and there are potholes in some of the lanes. Hoffer is prepared to dodge the potholes when he runs, but Tessa can tell Mark is pulling their leg. Tessa falls for nothing.

When they get inside, the team meets in their designated area. Mr. Frazier goes over the order of events with the runners, and it appears that he, Wendy, and Erika will all have a busy day. The standard order of events has been changed slightly to avoid runners participating in back to

back events. Eddie will be up first in the 40-yard dash. Right after that will be the 4 by 220 relay, causing Tessa to be a little nervous. This is her first State invitational meet, which is a great accomplishment considering she is a freshman.

While everyone is getting ready, Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, approaches Dr. Karakova, the Meet Director. Mr. Ruff says to him, "I'm really sorry to bother you, sir, but I feel I need to bring something to your attention that may be a violation of the rules." Dr. Karakova replies in a somewhat sarcastic manner, "oh really? What exactly is the violation you are bringing to my attention, Mr. Ruff?" Mr. Ruff replies, "Mr. Frazier has a few students running on his team that are probably not eligible to run. He told me himself that he traveled to the Amazon and somewhere called Paradise Island to pick them up. He said he brought them back to the United States himself." Mr. Ruff complains a lot, but it never really gets him anywhere.

Dr. Karakova, now giving Mr. Ruff his undivided attention, responds, "oh really? Who specifically are these alleged ineligible runners?" Mr. Ruff replies, "the four girls on his team. They seem to have come out of nowhere this year. Frazier even said it was hard to get a visa for the blonde girl because no one knows her birthday."

Dr. Karakova asks Mr. Ruff, "can you point them out to me?" Mr. Ruff and Dr. Karakova walk to the other side of the arena to get a closer look. Dr. Karakova has an idea what may be going on but, since he is the Meet Director, he must investigate all complaints of this nature.

Mr. Ruff identifies Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa as the four Amazon women on Mr. Frazier's team. Dr. Karakova inquires, "which blonde is the one with the alleged undocumented birthday?" Mr. Ruff replies, "Frazier told me it's the taller one." Dr. Karakova explains, "Mr. Ruff, that's my daughter, Kathy. I can assure you that I know her birthday and that she is not from the Amazon. And, the girl standing with her is Paula. They've been friends since kindergarten. And the other two are Barbara and Tessa, neither of whom are from the Amazon as far as I know. But, since you've made this complaint, I'll investigate." Mr. Ruff has realized that Mr. Frazier may have pulled a good one over on him, and walks away highly embarrassed. But, as Mr. Ruff is walking away, the phrase that Dr. Karakova used, "as far as I know," raises even more questions in Mr. Ruff's mind.

Dr. Karakova walks over to Mr. Frazier, telling him, "I really hate to bother you, George, but I've had a complaint against your team. Even though I don't think it has any validity, I nevertheless must investigate." Mr. Frazier, wondering what Mark has done now, inquires, "what's the nature of the complaint?" Dr. Karakova explains to Mr. Frazier, "the

Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, suspects that the four women on your team are from the Amazon.”

Before Dr. Karakova could even finish, Mr. Frazier starts laughing, and explains, “you’ve got to be kidding me! He asked me after the first meet this year where I got the women. I told him I went to the Amazon and Paradise Island to find them! I had no idea he took me seriously!” Dr. Karakova and Mr. Frazier have a good laugh, starting the busy day out with a little bit of comedy.

Dr. Karakova then goes back to some more relevant duties. Mr. Ruff, on the other hand, sees Dr. Karakova and Mr. Frazier having a good laugh together, raising even more suspicion that something is amiss.

Mr. Frazier calls the team together, reminding them again of what he told Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, at the start of the season. Mr. Frazier then fills his team in on the complaint against him and the team. Apparently, Mr. Frazier’s joke not only traveled farther than he expected, but it has been taken more seriously than he ever expected. The girls start laughing hysterically, putting them in a really good mood before the meet. Mr. Frazier suspected this would be the case. Seeing the girls laugh also puts Mr. Frazier in a really good mood, starting the day off on a positive note. Best of all, Tessa is no longer nervous.

The call is made by the Meet Announcer for the 40-yard dash. The team wishes Eddie good luck, and Kathy gives him a hug. Mr. Frazier and Eddie head to the starting line. Eddie is in the first heat, along with a few other highly ranked runners. Eddie briefly looks over the field, and then ignores them. The field, however, has heard of Eddie, many of them remembering him from last year.

One of the runners asks, “are you that Eddie guy?” Eddie is not in the mood to talk to anyone before the race, so he replies, “it depends who’s asking.” With a gold medal at stake, Eddie knows better than to be distracted at this time. With the race about to start, Mr. Frazier moves over to the coach’s area, near the finish line.

The Starter tells the first heat to get ready. Eddie positions his blocks, and is ready to run. The Starter announces, “on your marks.” The runners appear to be ready, some taking longer than usual. The Starter eventually announces, “set.” The buzzer is sounded, signifying the start of the race and this year’s State invitational meet.

Eddie is out of the blocks faster than lightning, and at ten yards, it appears as if it is going to be a one-man race. At 20 yards, Eddie is clearly the leader and will be the winner. The lack of any real competition in this heat, however, does not stop Eddie from running his fastest. Eddie

crosses the finish line first, with the number two contender five yards behind him. Mr. Frazier, giving Eddie a high-five, tells him, "I clocked you at a 4.5! But, even if I'm off a bit, it's an awesome run!"

Eddie and Mr. Frazier walk back to the team area as the second heat approaches the starting line. Both Eddie and Mr. Frazier know that Eddie is in the final. As they approach the bench, Braden exclaims, "it looked like you kicked ass, bro!" Kathy gives Eddie a hug, telling him, "you made that look so easy." Eddie takes a seat, knowing that his work has only begun for today.

Mr. Frazier tells the group, "next up for us is the 4 by 220 relay. Hoffer, Tessa, Zaino, and Bell, go and see Wendy. She has the stats on the competition. You've seen it before, but take another look." Mr. Frazier can assign either Bell or Braden to run the anchor leg in this event, and expect a competitive time. They take a look at the stats, finding out that the competition is tough. Mr. Frazier tells them, "you guys are definitely going to have to run your best if you want to take home a medal today."

Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula sit back on the bench, talking with Hoffer and Tessa as the call for the 4 by 220 relay event is announced. Mark asks Tessa, "who's leading off?" Tessa replies, "Zaino. He hands off to me." Mark tells Zaino, "hey, tell the guy in the inside lane his shoelaces are not regulation, and are too long. Tell him he might trip and cause an accident on the track." The team in the inside lane is the top seed. Casting doubt on even a trivial issue is not what a runner needs before the buzzer sounds. The other team members wish the relay team good luck, which they will need if Mr. Frazier's statistics hold true.

The 4 by 220 relay team is in the first heat, in lane four. Watching as the runners get ready, Mark comments to Eddie, "Zaino just told the guy his shoelaces are not regulation and are too long. Look at that. He keeps adjusting them." Eddie replies, "that will add a few seconds to their time." The race starts, with the runners clearly demonstrating why the 4 by 220 relay is sometimes called the sprint relay. Halfway through the first leg, Mark comments, "I don't think I've ever seen Zaino run so fast." Eddie replies, "they all know Tessa wants a medal." Mark adds, "and, it's Zaino's last year too."

Kathy stands up, screaming, "go Tessa!" as Tessa receives the baton. Tessa, who was in fourth place, moves up to third place on the back straightaway. This is very encouraging to the rest of the relay team. Apparently, one of the runners got distracted by a girl on the track, and bungled the handoff. The bungled handoff instantly put Hoffer in second place.

After handing off to Hoffer, Tessa walks off the track, swinging her hips as she walks back to the transition zone. Kathy then asks Paula, “hey, did you see that?” Paula says, “yeah! She was swinging her hips when she got off the track. That guy looked back at her while he was going into the curve.” Mark mentions, “between that, the shoelace thing, and the bungled handoff, those three teams just blew it.”

Bell, who just received the baton, has his work cut out for him. He can't allow the top seeded team, currently in third place, to catch him. He has got to overtake the second seeded team, currently in first place. Braden stands up, as he is watching Bell on the back straightaway. Braden is the first to notice that Bell is gaining on the leader. Braden exclaims, “Bell's taking it! He's after him! Bell's kicking ass!” Everyone on the bench stands, as Bell approaches the finish. When they exit the curve into the final straightaway, Bell is the leader by only a yard or two. Bell crosses the finish line first, winning by a very slim margin.

Tessa, who is jumping up and down, cheers wildly along with Hoffer. Mr. Frazier, looking at his stopwatch, breaks out in a smile. This is good news to the relay team. Mr. Frazier's smile is clearly indicative of a good time. The bad news, however, is that there are more heats to run, so they will have to wait to see where they ultimately placed in the competition.

On the way back to the bench, Mr. Frazier exclaims with a loud voice, “that was an awesome race! I have to get back to the Amazon and get some more of these women!” When the relay team gets back to the bench, they are welcomed with high-fives from the other team members. Tessa, however, is special. She gets hugs from the other girls.

For Northside High, Barbara and Mitchell are next up in the mile, but they will have to wait for a few other events to finish first. In the field area, Bobby B., in the top three so far, is having a good day. Erika walks over to the field area a few more times than is necessary to get an update from Mr. Zunde for Mr. Frazier. After the mile, the final for the 40-yard dash will be run. Kathy and Paula have a long time to wait, and spend most of the time relaxing and cheering.

The call for the one-mile run is made. Barbara and Mitchell walk to the starting line with Mr. Frazier. Barbara tells Mitchell, “just to let you know, I'm going to burn a few of them out on the first two or three laps. Then I'll see how it goes. If there is a strong runner, I'll let him set the pace for a few laps.” It is good for Mitchell to know Barbara's race strategy ahead of time. This way, Barbara and Mitchell will not get tangled up on the track, trying to figure out each other's strategy. Barbara and Mitchell have the race down to a science. In the mile, strategy is an important part of the skill set.

Mr. Frazier has his own strategy. Right before the runners get into position, he yells out to Barbara, “run like you did when I saw you in the Amazon!” This turns the heads of a few of the coaches, many who have heard of the rumor of Mr. Frazier and his Amazon women. Mr. Frazier apparently has been taking lessons from Mark regarding the value of psychological warfare. Mr. Frazier’s comment to Barbara deeply disturbs Rudy Parker, the coach from Henderson High, who can be seen talking privately to one of the Lane Judges. But, if anyone was astute, they would notice that Barbara has a distinct British accent. British accents are a bit more common in Britain than deep in the Amazon Jungle.

The one-mile run begins, and Barbara takes an early lead. After the first lap, Mr. Frazier tells Wendy, “run back to the bench and have everyone start cheering, ‘Amazon, Amazon, Amazon!’” In a few seconds, the cheering starts, with many of the spectators in the stands joining in. The words, ‘Amazon, Amazon, Amazon,’ echo through the arena. The cheering certainly gives credence to the rumor that these women are from the Amazon. After all, hundreds of people cannot possibly be wrong.

Meanwhile, back on the track, a few of the runners who were trying to keep pace with Barbara have dropped back a bit. Barbara, who is energetically charged, is in first place. She knows that all of the cheering is for her. Mitchell is following closely, and is in second place. Halfway through the race, Barbara decides to pick up the pace, with Mitchell following. Barbara does not want to disappoint her newly found fan club.

The gap between Barbara and Mitchell, and the rest of the field, begins to widen. The cheering increases in intensity as the end of the race draws near. Barbara runs the last lap of the race as if she is running a 220-yard dash. At the finish line, Barbara takes the gold medal, and Mitchell the silver medal. Taking the bronze medal is John McNamara from Centerville. In fourth place is Zak Ward, from Henderson High, who would have won the bronze medal if Mr. Frazier had not taken that sneaky little trip to the Amazon.

After Barbara catches her breath, in her British accent, she screams out, “Amazon!” Mr. Frazier congratulates Barbara, and Wendy gives her a hug. Erika would also give Barbara a hug, but she is too busy making sure Bobby B’s. shot-put is up to spec. Erika would certainly not want Bobby B. to throw a dirty shot-put. The milers, taking a look at Barbara, wonder if she really is from the Amazon. Mr. Parker, the coach from Henderson High, is somehow convinced that she is. As Barbara returns to the bench, the girls give her a hug, and the guys give her high-fives.

The call for the 40-yard dash final is made, and Eddie is now up. Based on the preliminaries, Eddie is the top seed, and is in lane three. The runners check each other out, somehow gauging each other’s speed

by the appearance of their thigh and calf muscles. Eddie walks up, and comments to the other finalists, "I already won this race once today. Why do I have to do it a second time?" The Starter laughs at Eddie's comment, worrying some of the contestants. Mr. Frazier mentions to Eddie, "don't worry. You're the only one in the arena faster than my Amazon women." Eroding the confidence of the finalists, Eddie has gained a distinct advantage.

As they get ready behind the blocks, the runner next to Eddie asks him, "are those girls really from the Amazon?" Eddie replies with confidence, "well, yeah. Our coach went there himself to get them last Summer. And, didn't you hear the cheering? Do you think we just make this shit up?"

The Starter announces, "on your marks." All eyes are on the starting line. As the arena goes quiet, Kathy yells out, "go, Eddie!" Kathy's comment certainly distracts some of the runners. The Starter announces, "set." The buzzer sounds, and the 40-yard dash final is underway. Eddie, who is out of the blocks first, takes a very early lead. At 20 yards, it appears that Eddie already has the race wrapped up, but the field of five other runners is too closely bunched up to call second and third place. Eddie crosses first, taking the gold medal this year. Second and third place are too close to call, so the officials will resort to the photograph of the finish.

At the finish, Mr. Frazier congratulates Eddie, giving him a high-five, exclaiming, "great job! You were clocking! You won State!" Eddie remarks to Mr. Frazier, "that was easier than last year." Mr. Frazier replies, "you're getting faster. But, I agree. The field was not as good this year."

When they arrive at the bench, Kathy gives Eddie a huge hug, and is very slow to let him go. Eddie and Kathy take a little time to rest. Kathy had to wake up early today, and wants lunch. They go to find a bite to eat as Mark prepares to run the 220-yard dash.

After lunch, Eddie and Kathy go outside for a while, and walk around, searching for a place to sit and relax. Kathy tells him, "you won this year! You got the gold medal!" Eddie replies, "so far, the team won gold in everything we ran in this year." Kathy lays her head on Eddie shoulders, and mentions, "yeah, I know. Mark probably just got a gold medal, and we're out here missing it." Eddie replies, "yeah, and Braden's going to be kicking ass in the 440, and we're going to miss that too."

Kathy tells Eddie, "I really want a gold medal too, but do you know what the best part would be if I get one?" Eddie thinks for a moment and replies, "yeah, I do." Quite surprised, Kathy sits up and asks Eddie, "you

do?” Eddie tells Kathy, “yeah. The best part is that we won it together.” Kathy exclaims, “Eddie, I love you so much! And, if we win it, it will be our medal.” Quite confidently, Eddie tells Kathy, “don’t worry, we’ll win.”

After a while, Kathy falls asleep on Eddie’s shoulder. Eddie lets her sleep for an hour, knowing that the rest will do her good. When Kathy wakes up, she tells Eddie, “I think I fell asleep.” Eddie replies, “yeah, sleeping beauty. You slept for a whole hour!” Kathy asks, “I did?” Eddie replies, “uh huh. But, you needed the rest.” With their lunch time being long over, they head back inside to see what they’ve missed.

When they get back inside to the bench, they find out that Mark did, in fact, take the gold medal in the 220-yard dash, and Braden just won his heat in the 440-yard dash. Braden is still exclaiming about how badly he beat everyone in the race.

Barbara fills Kathy and Eddie in on what they missed. Barbara mentions, “you should have heard Braden. He was telling everyone that they should just give him all the medals right now and tell everyone else to go home. He made the best scene ever. And, he ran his best time ever too.” Eddie mentions, “wow! I wish that I could have seen that.” Barbara reminds them, “oh, you’ll see it again. He’s up again in the mile medley in a little while.” Kathy mentions, “hey! That means we’re up real soon!” When Barbara walks away, Kathy whispers to Eddie, “I’m really glad we had our little break outside. I needed a nap.”

The mile medley relay could not have come soon enough. The call for the race is announced, and the relay team gets ready to run. Braden exclaims, “I’m kicking ass again! Ain’t no one stopping me today! Who want’s their ass kicked? Get on the track, and come and get your ass kicking!” Many of the opposing teams do not know what to make of Braden.

Mr. Frazier whispers to Wendy, “run over to the bench again and tell the team to cheer, ‘Amazon, Amazon, Amazon’, again when the race starts.” Barbara grins when she hears Mr. Frazier’s plan. Mr. Frazier asks Barbara, “can you do that scream like Kathy does?” Barbara, who will be running the 880-yard leg, replies, “I sure can! But, it might have a British accent.” Mitchell asks, “how does a scream have a British accent?” Barbara, pulling Mitchell’s leg, tells him, “listen carefully. You’ll hear it.” Mr. Frazier informs Barbara and the rest of the relay team, “that scream is guaranteed to distract at least one person.”

The Starter tells the runners, “on your marks.” Braden is ready, and finds it difficult to remain still. The command, “set,” is given. The buzzer sounds, and Braden takes off like a wild man. Everyone on the bench starts cheering, “Amazon, Amazon, Amazon!” It does not take long for

the spectators to join in. Braden is doing what he came here for, which is to kick ass, and he is doing a fine job of it. When he hands off the baton to Johnson, the team is in first place by a significant margin.

Johnson, who started off with a significant lead, extends the lead as the second 220-yard leg is underway. Johnson is right up there with the best at this distance. He hands off to Mitchell, who is running the quarter mile leg. Mitchell, who is a distance man, can sprint the quarter mile with no problem at all. His job right now is to maintain the lead, as no one is likely to beat Barbara. As Mitchell is in his second lap, Barbara steps onto the track. Mitchell hands off the baton to Barbara, who lets out a primal scream that can be heard over all the cheering.

The crowd cheers “Amazon, Amazon, Amazon!” even louder now that Barbara is on the track. The Henderson coach, Mr. Parker, is obviously annoyed at the chanting, evidenced by his clipboard abruptly being thrown to the ground. He still thinks the women on Mr. Frazier’s team are from the Amazon.

Two laps into the four-lap leg, it is unlikely that the second place Henderson team will catch Barbara. During the last lap, the crowd cheers even louder. Barbara approaches the finish line, and crosses first, with no one remotely close behind her.

The mile medley relay team has a huge celebration before they head back to the bench, exchanging high-fives. Mr. Frazier, who again cannot contain his excitement, congratulates them for their stellar performance. On the way to the bench, Barbara waves to the spectators, who cheer loudly. Never before in a State invitational meet has one person attracted so much attention. Mr. Frazier, himself, is even beginning to enjoy all the attention given to his team.

Back at the bench, Eddie, Kathy, Mark and Paula are warming up. Mr. Frazier instructs the bench to start the Amazon chant again when the 4 by 440 relay starts. Mr. Frazier saw the reaction of the crowd when Barbara waved to them after the race. He instructs Kathy and Paula to wave to the crowd as they walk to the starting line. He also tells Paula, “let out a primal scream if you can when you get the baton.” The primal scream could only distract an opponent, and make the Amazon chants get louder.

The call is made for the 4 by 440 relay, and the team heads to the starting line. Kathy and Paula wave to the crowd, and the Amazon chant begins again. At the starting line are McCutchen, and the Centerville team, who is assigned to lane three. Mark is always glad to see McCutchen at the starting line. McCutchen provides free entertainment to Mark.

This time, Mark tells McCutchen, “we have two Amazon women in this race, and they’re both faster than me.” McCutchen replies to Mark, “so what. I hear they are going to be disqualified because they are not even from here.” Mark replies, “well, don’t worry about it then. And, don’t even bother trying to catch them.” Mark just did it again to McCutchen, without even trying. McCutchen will not even attempt running his best, thinking the number one seeded Northside High team will be disqualified.

The Starter issues the command, “on your marks.” Paula is on the sidelines, jumping up and down and running in place to stay warmed up, as Mark is ready to take off. The Starter announces, “set.” Mark is thinking he is not only running for his medal, but Paula’s too. The buzzer sounds, and Mark leaves the blocks, demonstrating to everyone that he is not going to let Paula down.

The Amazon chant picks up, energizing Kathy and Paula. After the first lap, Mark is in the lead, but McCutchen, on the sidelines, reminds his other team members that Mark’s team is going to be disqualified. Paula gets on the track, waiting for Mark.

Mark hands off to Paula, who lets out a primal scream, causing heads to turn. Paula’s first lap surprises the opponents. Many expect someone to catch her, but she not only maintains the lead, but widens it. On Paula’s second lap, the Centerville runner has passed two other teams, and is now in second place. Kathy gets on the track, and two lanes over is McCutchen, who looks worried. Mark yells out to Kathy, “kick lane three’s ass for me.” Paula comes out of the final curve, and Kathy is as ready as ever to win her own medal. In the center of the track is Kathy’s father, who stands proudly as her daughter is about to receive the baton.

Paula hands off to Kathy, who lets out the loudest primal scream of the day. Kathy’s scream results in the crowd cheering “Amazon, Amazon, Amazon!” even louder. McCutchen is distracted by Paula and Kathy’s handoff, causing him to leave a bit late. McCutchen loses a few seconds with his bungled handoff, as Mark laughs from the sidelines. Kathy is running the fastest that she ever has, and she knows it.

Kathy’s father, who is watching his daughter’s every step, cannot believe what he is seeing. One of the Field Judges comments to Dr. Karakova, “wow! She is really fast.” Dr. Karakova proudly tells him, “that’s Kathy, my daughter.” The Field Judge replies, “well, there’s the proof that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Eddie is waiting anxiously for the baton, as Kathy comes around the curve.

Kathy hands off the baton to Eddie, who grabs it, and takes off like lightning. Eddie is not about to let Kathy or Paula down. Eddie is now running for four medals. Paula turns to the crowd, and raises her arms,

yelling, "Amazon!" After Kathy catches her breath, she joins in with Paula. The crowd turns up the volume even more. This may not make Eddie run any faster, but it could certainly distract the competition.

After Eddie's first lap, the race is over. Eddie's only opponent now is the clock. Eddie visualizes Kathy's own medal around her neck, as he sprints the final 220 yards. Eddie crosses the finish line first, possibly running his fastest 440-yard event ever. Henderson High takes second place in this heat, with McCutchen and Centerville taking fourth place. Centerville would have placed better if McCutchen would just learn to focus on the race.

Eddie walks back to his relay team, where they celebrate as if they have already won the gold medal. Eddie and Kathy hug each other, as do Mark and Paula. There are a few more heats to run, but it's safe to say that the Northside High School team has earned a medal in this event.

On the way to the bench, Mr. Frazier tells the relay team, "that was your best run of the year, and you guys are the number one seed!" The team knows exactly what this means, which is they have won the gold medal unless there is an upset in the following heats. Kathy and Paula wave to the crowd as they walk by. The crowd claps and cheers for the relay team, well, mostly for the girls. When they arrive at the bench, all they can do now is to sit and wait.

While the final heats are being run, Coach Rudy Parker from Henderson High approaches the Meet Director, Dr. Karakova. This is the second time during the meet that Henderson has been beaten badly by Mr. Frazier's Amazon women. Mr. Parker is not happy at all. Mr. Parker tells Dr. Karakova, "I hate to bring this up so late in the game, sir, but someone has to say something." Dr. Karakova suspects that he knows exactly what this is about. He interrupts and politely tells Mr. Parker, "if this is about Amazon women, I can assure you that the women on Mr. Frazier's team are not from the Amazon." Mr. Parker replies, asking, "how can we know for sure? They all just showed up this year, and are faster than all the guys." Dr. Karakova, who is quite amused by this rumor, tells Mr. Parker, "Mr. Frazier assured me himself that they are not from the Amazon. But, since you've brought it up, let's go check it out." Dr. Karakova and Mr. Parker walk over to the Northside Bench.

At the Northside bench there is an enormous amount of celebration. When Kathy sees her father approaching, she runs up to him, all excited, asking him, "did you see me run?" Her father tells her, "yes! That was a really good run! It was definitely in the mid to lower fifties."

Mr. Parker is suddenly puzzled. This was supposed to be a disciplinary session for Mr. Frazier. Instead, it is starting out like a sweet

sixteen party. It doesn't take long for the team to gather around Kathy's father. By now, they all know him from his attendance at the regular season meets. Kathy's father congratulates all the runners, and mentions to Barbara, "I'm really looking forward to seeing you next year at the University."

Dr. Karakova turns his attention back to Mr. Parker. It doesn't take Mr. Frazier too long to figure out why Mr. Parker is at the Northside bench with Dr. Karakova. Mr. Frazier asks Dr. Karakova, "is this about the Amazon women again?" Dr. Karakova replies, "I'm afraid it is, George." Mr. Frazier, faking disgust, replies, "how many times do I have to say this? Only two of the women are from the Amazon. The other two are from Paradise Island!"

Mr. Parker interrupts, and tells Dr. Karakova, "see? He even admits it himself! You've got to do something!" Dr. Karakova tells Mr. Parker, "you know, you might be right. I've heard it myself. I'll definitely do something about this. Thank you for bringing this to my attention." Mr. Parker heads back to the Henderson bench, feeling that justice will finally be served.

If anyone had actually paid attention, they would notice that Kathy is Eastern European, Paula is Italian, Barbara is a black British girl, and Tessa is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed German girl. None of them even remotely appear as it they are from the Amazon. But, coaches like Mr. Ruff, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Lyons sometimes overlook the obvious.

The teams have a half hour before the awards ceremony, so they take the time to get a bite to eat. At the concession stand, pizza is served, so it doesn't take the team too long to decide what to have for dinner. Mr. Frazier even joins them, having a few slices himself. After all, the season is over, and they have a week before the Spring season begins. Kathy orders her usual discus, but she has to explain what she means to the person behind the counter. Mr. Frazier overhears her conversation, and tells the rest of the team, "you guys really have a lot of fun!" While they sit and enjoy their dinner, Mr. Frazier gets a lesson on the discus, shot-put, and javelins cut up into small pieces that they are all consuming.

After dinner, they enter the arena where the awards ceremony has just begun. The Meet Announcer introduces today's officials, and congratulates the athletes for just making it this far. Mr. Frazier is at the high point of his career as a track coach. His team has won seven gold medals and two silver medals, which is unheard of in track and field competition at the State level. Most teams are fortunate enough just to have one runner or relay team present at the State competition.

The announcement is made to introduce the winners of the 40-yard dash. Eddie's name is called, and he heads to the first place tier. When Eddie is draped with his medal, the entire bench cheers. Eddie, a sophomore, has now set the standard for the next two years of high school competition in the State. If anyone expects to beat Eddie, they will have a tough road ahead of them. Eddie returns to the bench, where Kathy takes a look at his medal. Kathy kindly informs Eddie that he is allowed to keep his medal this year.

The ceremony progresses, and Hoffer, Tessa, Zaino, and Bell receive the gold medal in the 4 by 220 relay. The Amazon chant begins as the spectators see Tessa take the stage. When they return to the bench, Tessa has tears of happiness flowing like a river just looking at her medal. Hoffer, a freshman, was just happy that he made the team. He never expected to go this far this season. Zaino and Bell are having their best season ever as seniors.

Barbara and Mitchell are called to the stage, with Barbara taking the gold medal in the mile, and Mitchell taking the silver. As Barbara takes the first place tier, the crowd begins the Amazon cheer again. Mitchell hopes to stand on the first place tier next year when Barbara goes off to college. But, today he is pleased with the silver medal in the mile. Barbara's outstanding performance this season motivated Mitchell to step up his game. Today, he receives his award for his efforts.

Mark is called to the stage, winning the gold medal in the 220-yard dash. Mark had a choice this year as the season progressed. Mark could have run the 40-yard dash, but Eddie was faster in that event. Mark chose to run the 220-yard dash, a race in which he could be number one. Mr. Frazier advised Mark to run the 220-yard dash, not only to benefit the team, but also Mark. If Eddie and Mark ran in the same race, one of them would always have to settle for second place. Today, that decision paid off.

Halfway through the ceremony, the focus turns to the field events. Bobby B. is called to the stage, winning the silver medal in the shot-put. The senior, who took the gold medal, beat Bobby B. by a very slim margin. This is good news to the shot doc. Next year he will likely be number one in the State. Mr. Zunde reminds Bobby B. that his silver medal is a significant accomplishment for a sophomore. Mr. Zunde also suggested that, if he wants the gold medal, Bobby B. should carry Erika around on his shoulders more often. Erika was certainly glad to hear that.

Braden kicked ass in the 440-yard dash, just like he said he was going to. With the second and third place winners being seniors, no one can reasonably be expected to beat Braden in the next two years. In fact, Braden's earlier comment that everybody might as well just stay home

now has some weight behind it. If all goes well, Braden will be consistently running a sub-50 second quarter mile next year.

Braden takes the stage again, this time with Johnson, Barbara, and Mitchell for the mile medley relay. The Amazon chant begins again when Barbara takes the stage with the rest of the relay team. Mr. Parker, the Henderson coach, is wondering when justice will be served against Mr. Frazier. While they receive their awards, Barbara expresses her joy through tears running down her face. After Barbara receives her medal, she waves at the crowd as she leaves the stage, receiving an unprecedented level of applause.

The ceremony ends with the 4 by 440 relay. Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula are called to the stage. The Meet Announcer tells everyone, "Dr. Karakova, our Meet Director, would like the opportunity to announce the awards for the final event, which is the 4 by 440 relay." Dr. Karakova takes the microphone, and thanks everyone for attending the meet today.

Dr. Karakova then makes the announcement, "the gold medal in the 4 by 440 relay event goes to Northside High School. Running for Northside in this event are Mark Svoboda, Paula Giovani, Katarina Karakova, and Edward Bogenskaya. Please come up to the stage." Dr. Karakova then announces the second and third place teams, also calling them to the stage.

Dr. Karakova then makes a surprise announcement, "this year, you have to hand it to Coach George Frazier from Northside High School. He spent his own money and time traveling to the Amazon and Paradise Island in search of women who can run fast, and deliver the times necessary to compete at this level." Kathy and Paula, both on the stage, find it difficult not to laugh. Surprisingly, the crowd cheers at Dr. Karakova's comment. Dr. Karakova continues, "these amazing Amazon women have received gold medals in four events this year."

Mr. Parker, the coach from Henderson High, is disgusted at Dr. Karakova's address. After hearing the words, "he spent his own money and time traveling to the Amazon and Paradise Island in search of women who can run fast," Mr. Parker kicked the bench, and headed to the locker room. Mr. Parker did not even have the common decency to watch as his 4 by 440 relay team receives their award. Now entering the locker room, Mr. Parker is about to miss the rest of Dr. Karakova's words.

Dr. Karakova then clears a few things up, announcing, "one of the women from Paradise Island, Katarina, on stage right now, is my daughter, whom I am very proud of today. The other woman from Paradise Island, standing next to her, is Paula, who Katarina has known since kindergarten. Barbara Wyngate is from the Amazon. Barbara,

please wave to the audience. Barbara has been waiting for this moment for years, and will be attending the State University, where I am on the faculty, next year. And, Tessa Klement, the youngest of Mr. Frazier's Amazon tribe, is a freshman, and is standing right next to Barbara." The crowd starts the Amazon chant again, and this time Mr. Frazier joins in.

The 4 by 440 relay team members are draped with their medals, as Kathy's father gives her a hug. Kathy looks at her medal over and over, glancing over at Eddie with tears of happiness rolling down her face. She earned this medal herself, and will treasure it forever. Kathy and Paula worked hard for their prize. They went to practice every day. They rode their bicycles to the beach. They worked out with their boyfriends. And, they took track and field seriously. On top of the world, they walk back to the bench, where the team cheers and exchanges high-fives. The girls wave to the spectators, many who cheered for them even though they came to root for other teams and individuals.

With the team taking so many medals, college scouts, photographers, and people from the news media congregate around the Northside bench. The team poses for photographs, displaying their medals proudly around their necks. Mr. Frazier organizes a small press conference, answering the questions posed by the press. Oddly, the rumor of Mr. Frazier traveling to the Amazon and Paradise Island to find the women on his team has not died down in the least bit. Instead of fighting the rumor, Mr. Frazier and the team allow it to continue. In fact, Mr. Frazier finally has to tell one reporter that he is planning a trip next Summer as well.

Dr. Karakova comes over to the bench to congratulate the team, along with the parents of the team members. Some of the runners from other teams come over briefly to share in the celebration, with many of them secretly wanting a close-up look at the women on the Northside High School team. After a while, the celebration ends because the busses are waiting, and it's late, so everyone wants to get home. But, the celebration will continue over the next few days. The team heads out to the bus. On the way, they carry Mr. Frazier out of the arena, demonstrating to all what a fantastic coach he is.

Monday at school, the medalists all proudly display their medals around their necks. Kathy is asked a few times if the medal she has around her neck is Eddie's. Many of her classmates remember last year, when Eddie gave Kathy his gold medal that he won during the indoor track season. Kathy is proud to tell everyone, "no. I won this one myself!" When the girls see Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa with their own medals, they become highly motivated and believe that they can achieve their dreams as well, whatever they may be.

With a week off before the Spring tryouts begin, the team will get a well-deserved break. Eddie and Kathy decide to take the week off from training. Mark and Paula also decide to do the same. They have pushed themselves hard over the last few months. Overtraining is not a good thing anyway. Overtraining leads to frequent injuries and lack of any forward progress. Taking a week off will also allow any minor injuries to heal. The result is that, when the Spring season begins, they will all return to the track faster and stronger.