

Eddie, The Junior Year

Chapter Two Indoor Track Tryouts

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Now that Christmas break is over, it's back to school. During the first week of Winter semester, the tryouts for the Winter sports teams are the big item on the agenda for many of the students. A few months ago, Kathy was much faster than she has ever been. Paula is also faster than she has ever been. They both did well in their first year of competition last season. It's safe to assume that Mr. Crum will not be bothering the team too much this year. Kathy's father hopefully took care of that problem last semester.

It will be interesting this year to see how the team comes together. With Barbara now in college, Mitchell will fill the position of the school's, and now the regional, star miler. Louis Zaino and Darryl Bell, who the team could always count on to deliver when necessary, are also gone. Ambrosini, however, is still around, and is keeping a low profile.

Zaino, in particular, will be missed. While he was not necessarily the fastest guy on the team, he always helped out the newer runners. Zaino once told Eddie that, in some races, you just run as fast as you need to in order to win. This is good advice, which helps to minimize the potential for injury. That is Mitchell's strategy, which has worked quite well for him in the past.

And, Bell never failed to come through. Bell always delivered when the team needed him to. Everyone remembers quite well when Bell ran the anchor leg in the 4 by 220 relay during the indoor State invitational meet last year. Giving it all he had, Bell passed the lead runner, bringing in the gold medal for the relay team. No one forgot that race.

Hoffer, who quickly assumed the position as a core member of the team last year, will return this year. Tessa, who has been working out to develop more power in her flip turn since last Summer, will also return for

the indoor season. Taking Barbara's advice on strengthening her legs, Tessa might just very well be this year's big surprise on the track.

Last Summer, Eddie beat Tessa in the 100-yard freestyle. Barbara noticed that, although Tessa can swim faster than Eddie, Eddie won the race because of the power in his flip turn. As a result, Tessa has been doing a lot of work strengthening her legs. Tessa is not about to lose to Eddie during the next rematch. Joining Tessa on the track this Winter will be Lena Borg, who will be back in the pool come Spring.

Bobby B. is ready to go. There's not any real competition for him in the shot-put on the horizon. Before the season starts, the shot doc is confident that he already has it wrapped up. Braden is looking forward to getting a good neck workout with all of the medals he expects to add to his collection this year. Johnson, who has been training with Barbara all Summer, is the only runner on the team that excels at sprints, middle distance, and long distance. Johnson is perhaps the school's best all-around runner.

Wendy and Erika will be helping with the team again. Erika, however, should be on the team. Last year, Erika ran the 100-yard dash in the middle ten-second range. Having never picked up a discus in her life, she also threw the discus a considerable distance on her first try. During last year's swimming race between Eddie and Tessa, Erika held her own. Erika has everyone wondering why she has never tried out for a sports team. Everyone did, however, discover that Erika excels in just about anything physical. Erika excels at sports because she is a bodybuilder, and bodybuilders generally have an advantage in any sport right from the beginning. If Mr. Frazier can get Erika off Bobby B's lap, she would make a great addition to the team.

Barbara will be helping out with the team this Winter and Spring. Obtaining a full track scholarship, she is now at the University, and is enrolled in the Exercise Science program. Barbara has arranged an internship working for Mr. Frazier and the high school track team. The tribe will be certainly glad to see her again, and so will Mr. Frazier. Barbara's expertise in distance races has helped Mr. Frazier considerably over the past four years.

The first day of Winter semester brings a crowd into the locker rooms after school. Eddie is unusually quiet today. Kathy hasn't worked out hard in a few weeks. Since she has not been pushed to her limit for a while, Eddie is concerned whether she has fully recovered yet. But, Kathy is more than ready to give it her best.

Mr. Zunde makes the usual announcement, directing the students to the proper location for the sport they are trying out for. The contenders

for a position on the track and field team meet in the hallway outside of the locker room. Eddie and the tribe all hang out together. Kathy, Paula, Tessa, and Amber are all dressed in their uniforms. Not knowing many of the upperclassmen, the freshmen all hang out together. As usual, the freshmen get a bit worried when they see the juniors and seniors. Some of the upperclassmen appear as if they are training for the Olympics, justifying the freshmen's anxiety.

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk down the hall together. With them today is Barbara, working her first day as an intern. Mr. Frazier announces, "this is the meeting place for indoor track. If you are looking to throw a ball through a hole in the sky or are joining the back alley rumble squad, you are in the wrong place." Some of the upperclassmen know that Mr. Frazier was referring to basketball and wrestling, and laugh. The freshmen, however, have no idea why he said that.

Mr. Frazier instructs the crowd to follow him, as he walks down the hallway. One of the freshmen mentions to another, "I guess we're running in the halls." Mr. Frazier stops at an unmarked door. The upperclassmen know exactly what is behind this door but, to the freshmen, as it is every year, is a mystery.

Mr. Frazier opens the door, and the group heads down the metal stairway. Behind the door is the open steel staircase leading to the full-sized 220-yard track where Eddie and the tribe have shown the entire region who's boss.

Mr. Frazier instructs the candidates to have a seat on the bleachers. The field of athletes trying out for the team this year is a little larger than last year. Mr. Frazier introduces himself, Mr. Zunde, and Barbara. As Wendy and Erika walk down the staircase, Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "Erika should be on the bleachers with the athletes." Mr. Frazier whispers back, "I know."

Mr. Frazier then gets down to business. He addresses the candidates, telling them, "the indoor track team has not lost a meet in this arena in the last two years. In fact, the indoor track team has not lost a meet anywhere in the last two years. In order to make this team, you must be a top notch athlete." Seeing Jimmy O'Brien sitting on the bleachers, Mr. Frazier says, "if you sat around for the last year, and are out of shape, this may not be the right place for you." Mr. Frazier continues addressing the team, with the dissertation that is all too familiar to Eddie and the tribe regarding the two races that are run in indoor track.

While Mr. Frazier is talking, Mark whispers to Eddie, "hey. I see your buddy over there." Eddie looks around, not knowing whom Mark is talking about. Eddie asks, "who?" Mark points to the bottom row, in the

center. Eddie, now seeing who Mark is referring to, whispers to Mark, “let the fun and games begin.” The guy sitting on the front row, right in front of Mr. Frazier, is none other than Chuckie. Chuckie might think that, after a few workouts, he will be as fast as anyone else on the team. Or, it could be that Chuckie is attempting to dethrone Bobby B., the shot doc. After all, Chuckie is now packing on the pounds. If he could put all his weight behind the shot-put, it might just fly a few feet.

Mr. Frazier instructs the sprinters to remain on the bleachers. He instructs anyone trying out for middle distance or long distance to follow Barbara to the other side of the arena. Anyone trying out for the field events is instructed to meet with Mr. Zunde. Everyone then moves to the location assigned to their desired event. Chuckie gets off the bleachers, and follows Mr. Zunde. O'Brien, however, remains on the bleachers, and will be apparently trying out for a sprinting event this year.

Eddie tells Mark, “hey, we’re in luck. The Chuckie is standing near Mr. Zunde.” Mark asks, “is he trying out for the high jump or the shot-put? What’s your guess?” Eddie replies, “the high jump. He probably thinks it’s a limbo bar, and he’ll go under it.” Mark laughs, and tells Eddie, “if the Chuckie tries out for the shot-put, we’ll have to tell Erika that it has to be sterilized after he touches it.” Eddie replies, “then, Bobby B. won’t let Chuckie touch the shot-put.” Bobby B. looks over at Eddie and Mark, grinning as if he knows something that they do not. Bobby B. clearly has something up his sleeve.

Mr. Frazier addresses the sprinters, telling them that they will all run the 40-yard dash for time. He tells them to do whatever they need to warm up. Mr. Frazier, however, does not instruct them how to warm up. He watches carefully to see who knows and who does not know how to properly warm up. Mr. Frazier announces that Eddie, Mark, Kathy, Paula, Braden, and Hoffer will run in the first heat. He tells everyone else to organize themselves in groups of six, preferably with others of their own skill level.

The first heat set their blocks and get ready to run. Mr. Frazier, Wendy, and Erika are all working two stopwatches each. Once they are ready, Mr. Frazier announces, “on your marks.” Mr. Frazier then announces, “set,” to the seasoned runners. The room goes silent, as the rest of the sprinters are about to learn what is expected of them. The buzzer sounds, and the A team is out of the blocks.

As they leave the blocks, Kathy lets out a primal scream that distracts the freshmen sitting on the bleachers. None of the freshmen expected to hear Kathy’s primal scream. After ten yards, Eddie takes the lead. Mark, Kathy, and Paula are all tied at ten yards. Mark takes a slight lead over the rest of the pack at twenty yards, trying to catch Eddie. At thirty yards,

Mark appears like he will take second place, but Kathy and Paula are still tied. The rest of the field is too close to call.

Finishing first is Eddie, quickly followed by Mark. Kathy and Paula tie for third place. Braden and Hoffer follow Kathy and Paula by less than one step. Mr. Frazier exclaims, "wow! Did everyone see that? The winning time is 4.6 seconds! Can you believe it? These guys were clocking!" Mr. Frazier then announces, "they're all a little slow today, but that was a good run!" Mr. Frazier is being a little comical today. The runners were anything but slow. The times they delivered could have easily gotten all of them to the State invitational meet.

After the run, Eddie gives Kathy a hug, telling her, "you did good." Kathy tells him, "yeah. But, I'm not right. I need to sit down." Eddie asks, "what's wrong?" Kathy, who is all out of breath, tells him, "I ran good but, after the race, I got dizzy. Something's still not right." Eddie gets Kathy some water, thinking that might help. Kathy tells Eddie, "it's like I was running really strong but, when I finished, someone pulled the plug on me." Kathy is slow to recover but, after a while, she gets back to normal. Kathy mentions to Eddie, "the doctor said it could take a while for me to get better, but it's been a lot longer than a while now."

Eddie sits with Kathy, as the other runners run their heats. Eddie is too concerned with Kathy at the moment to care about what else might be going on. Barbara walks over from the distance group, and asks Kathy, "are you okay?" Kathy replies, "I am now. But, after the race, I felt really weird. I got dizzy." Barbara suggests, "maybe you're dehydrated or something." Eddie mentions, "that's what I thought, so I got her some water." Kathy assures Eddie and Barbara that she is feeling a little better now. As Kathy and Eddie sit on the bleachers, Mark and Paula join them. They watch, as everyone else competes for a place on the team.

Mark mentions to Eddie, "hey, there's the Chuckie, with the shot-put." They all watch, as Chuckie attempts to break the school record in the shot-put. Mark, giving the play by play, announces, "here he is, the one and only Chuckie stepping up to the pad. He's got the shot-put in hand. Can he do it? Will he break the school record? Here he goes, using the special Chuckie technique that the world has never seen before. He springs back, and, wait! Look at that! Chuckie releases the shot-put, but it rolls off his hand, and goes in the wrong direction!" Eddie, Kathy, and Paula laugh hysterically. Mark, now moving into the realm of fiction, announces, "they get out the tape. And, the throw is a minus four feet! This is one for the record books! A new school record has been set for the worst shot-put throw ever! Minus four feet! Can anyone believe it? The Chuckie has done it again!" Paula tells Mark, "hey! You're on track for a career as a sports announcer."

Bobby B. laughs at Chuckie's failed shot-put attempt. Erika, recognizing Bobby B.'s laugh from a distance, looks in his direction. Bobby B. points to the shot-put laying on the ground behind the shot-put pad. He then points at Chuckie, signaling to Erika what just happened. Erika starts laughing hysterically herself. When Chuckie sees Erika laughing, Chuckie flips Erika a bird. Erika replies by making a gesture with her arm that apparently is known to only her and Chuckie. The gesture Erika returned to Chuckie infuriates him, and he flips Erika two birds. Erika laughs it off, and continues her duties working with the team.

Once the 40-yard dash heats are over, Mr. Frazier instructs the runners, "the next race today will be the 440-yard dash. You will run with the same group that you ran the 40-yard dash with. You will also run in the same order." Eddie, Mark, Kathy, Paula, Braden, and Hoffer will be in the first heat. This is Braden's race, and he lets everyone know it.

Braden exclaims, "I'm kicking ass in this race! This is my race! Everybody get out of my way. I'm kicking everyone's ass!" Seeing Jimmy O'Brien sitting on the bleachers, Braden points to him, exclaiming, "and, I'm kicking your scrawny little rat ass twice, junior!" The freshmen, who are not used to Braden's rants, think there's something wrong with him and that he's a bit on the crazy side. They will find out soon enough that Braden always delivers what he promises, and then some.

Eddie, and the rest of the first heat, step up to the blocks, setting them to their desired position. Mr. Frazier announces, "on your marks." The runners quickly get ready, and Mr. Frazier announces, "set." The arena falls silent, as the runners get set in the blocks. The buzzer sounds, and the runners are out of the blocks with lightning speed. Kathy again lets out a primal scream, letting everyone know she means business. The start is a very strong start. On the back straightaway, Eddie seems to be in the lead but, since it is a staggered start, it is difficult for those watching the race to tell.

Around the second turn something happens, and Kathy slows down, and walks off the track. Kathy immediately collapses, and falls to the ground. Trying to sit up, she is unable to. Eddie, realizing what happened, rushes back to his sweetheart. The other runners continue to run. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde also rush over to see what happened to Kathy. Eddie asks Kathy, "sweetie, what happened? Tell me!" Kathy tries to tell Eddie what happened, but she has difficulty getting the words out. Eddie holds Kathy, as she desperately tries to catch her breath.

Eddie tells Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, "the doctor said she had anemia a few months ago. She's been taking vitamins and iron for it." Eddie holds Kathy, as she still tries to catch her breath. A crowd gathers around Kathy, but Mr. Zunde tells everyone to get back on the bleachers. Mr.

Zunde, who is well versed in CPR, tells Mr. Frazier, “get an ambulance. I’ll wait here with her.” Mr. Frazier goes over to the phone in the arena and calls for an ambulance.

When Mr. Frazier returns, Kathy is slowly recovering. Eddie tells Mr. Zunde, “she said she was a little dizzy after the 40, but nothing like this. She ran a really good race. We thought she might be dehydrated.” Mr. Zunde asks Eddie, “when did this start?” Eddie replies, “she got an ear infection a while ago. The doctor gave her an antibiotic, and she hasn’t been right since.” Mr. Zunde asks, “when was that?” Eddie replies, “around the first week of school.” Eddie again tells Mr. Zunde, “they thought it was anemia, so the doctor gave her vitamins and iron. I think she’s been taking them for about three months now.” Mr. Zunde tells Eddie, “then, this is not simply anemia. Her doctor is an idiot. She needs to be checked out by someone who knows what they are doing.”

Kathy walks off the track with assistance from Eddie and Mr. Zunde. Mr. Zunde, as he is called, is actually Dr. Zunde. He prefers, however, to be called Mr. Zunde inside of school. Dr. Zunde has a Ph.D. in Exercise Science and a Ph.D. in Nutrition. He reasons that, if Kathy’s problem was truly anemia, the vitamins and iron should have cleared up any anemia by now. From the time the body begins to make a new red blood cell to the time that cell gets into the blood stream is three months. Properly treated, anemia will usually clear up within that time frame. If it does not, there is something else wrong. Six months ago, Kathy was the second fastest high school sprinter in the State. Right now, she can barely walk. Dr. Zunde is not taking any chances.

Eddie stays with Kathy, who is recovering slowly. Kathy is able to walk on her own again. She tells Eddie, “I’m okay now.” Eddie tells her, “yeah, but you’re not.” Mr. Zunde tells Kathy, “we’re going to have you checked out. They’re going to bring you to the emergency room to find out what’s really going on with you.” Kathy replies, “good! Because, that doctor I saw must be some kind of special idiot.” Eddie tells Mr. Zunde, “well, that’s good news. She sounds more like Kathy now.” Kathy, who ran 440 yards in 57 seconds last year, knows something is drastically wrong. She just wants to get better, but is not getting any answers from her own doctor.

The ambulance arrives to take Kathy to the hospital. The paramedics find nothing life threatening, but decide to transport her nevertheless. Eddie wants to go with her, but the paramedics initially deny it. Mr. Zunde has a talk with the paramedics, and they then allow Eddie to ride with Kathy to the hospital. The good news is that Kathy is able to walk up the stairs by herself. Eddie and the paramedics, nevertheless, help her.

The rest of the field finished the race, thinking that Kathy just pulled a muscle while she was running. Braden, with a time in the 55-second range, won the race. Mark and Paula, however, gave him a run for his money. Even though they didn't finish, Eddie and Kathy both still have their place on the team. The race they attempted to run was just a matter of formality. More important, at the moment, is finding out what is wrong with Kathy, and why she suddenly had to drop out of the race.

After the race, Mark, Paula, and the rest of the tribe, all became very concerned about Kathy. After Kathy and Eddie leave, tryouts continue. Everyone does their best, but with Kathy and Eddie not there, something is not quite the same.

Back at the shot-put pad, Chuckie is glad to see Eddie leave. Chuckie, trying to befriend Bobby B., tells him, "I'm glad Eddie's gone." Mr. Zunde, overhearing Chuckie's insensitive comment, tells him, "you're gone too. Get out of my arena. And, don't even think about coming back." Mr. Zunde was going to cut him anyway, so he decided to get rid of Chuckie sooner rather than later.

Chuckie leaves the arena, walking right through the middle of the red zone¹. Seeing Chuckie in the red zone, Bobby B. quickly grabs the shot-put and throws it in Chuckie's direction. Erika, seeing Chuckie leaving the arena, yells out to him, "have a nice life, loser!" It's apparently no secret that there is some past contention between Erika and Chuckie.

Kathy and Eddie arrive at the hospital. Kathy insists that she be allowed to walk in herself, which she is able to do. The paramedics walk next to her, just in case. Once inside, Eddie and the paramedics explain to the staff what happened to Kathy. They take Kathy to the back to check her out. Eddie takes a seat in the waiting area, hoping that it will not take too long to find the real problem.

While Eddie is waiting, Kathy's parents arrive at the emergency room. Mr. Zunde informed Kathy's parents what happened at track tryouts. When they see Eddie, they also ask him what happened, since he was right there next to her. Eddie gives them every last detail. Eddie finishes by telling Kathy's parents that Mr. Zunde said that Kathy's problem is not just a simple case of anemia. No one is arguing that point any longer. Kathy's parents walk up to the registration desk, and are escorted back to Kathy's room.

¹ Red Zone: That part of the field into where the airborne implements are thrown

When Kathy's parents walk into the room, Kathy exclaims, "why can't they find out what's wrong with me?" Kathy's dad assures her, "this time, we'll get to the bottom of it." Kathy exclaims to her parents, and to the doctor attending her, "last year, I was the fastest girl in the State! Now, I can't even run 40 yards without getting dizzy! Why?" The doctor tells Kathy, "please calm down. Getting all excited isn't going to help." Kathy tells the doctor, "well, then find out what's wrong with me! And then, I won't get 'all excited.'"

The doctor tells Kathy's parents, "honestly, we don't know what's wrong. Her EKG is excellent. Her blood pressure is fine. And, it certainly looks like she is in great shape. We're going to run a few blood tests. Perhaps that will show something." Kathy's mother tells the doctor, "she was diagnosed with anemia a few months ago. I brought her lab results." Mrs. Karakova hands a copy of the lab results to the doctor. The doctor looks over Kathy's lab reports. Mrs. Karakova tells him, "she's been taking vitamins and iron for the last three months." The doctor informs Kathy's parents, "this is definitely some form of anemia. I wouldn't call it a classical form. But, this will serve as a good comparison." The doctor asks, "may I keep this?" Mrs. Karakova replies, "sure, it's a copy."

They take a few vials of Kathy's blood, and send it to the lab to be tested. The doctor tells Kathy's parents that he will put a rush on it. If anyone asks Kathy, she'd tell them they took a few gallons of her blood, and they are moving slower than a snail. After all, the problem began when school started in the Autumn. It is now January, and Kathy is literally no better than she was several months ago.

The medical staff runs a few more tests, in hope of trying to find out what is wrong. The doctor tells Kathy's parents, "we going to try to rule out certain diseases." Kathy's father asks, "will that get us any closer to finding the answer?" The doctor replies, "not necessarily, but we'll know what it's not." Kathy, overhearing the conversation between her parents and the doctor, exclaims, "that doesn't make any sense! I want to know what it is, not what it's not! It's not a broken leg, so please tell me how knowing that helps!"

Kathy has a valid point. To rule out a disease is a statistical and mathematical nightmare, and is literally the dead end street of diagnosis. A potential diagnosis is ruled out when little, if any, belief exists in the possibility that the proposed diagnosis is even remotely correct. This is why the particular disease is being ruled out, and not being ruled in. The process of ruling out disease after disease leaves both the doctor and the patient with a list of diseases that the patient does not have. Obtaining the correct diagnosis by the procedure of ruling out is literally hoping to stumble upon the right answer. Kathy is fully correct in her analysis that ruling out certain diseases makes little sense.

Kathy's father steps out of the room to inform Eddie of what is going on. Eddie asks, "did they find out what's wrong with Kathy?" Kathy's father replies, "I wish I could tell you yes, but it looks like it is going to take some time. They're running some tests. Hopefully, we'll know something real soon." Eddie asks, "how soon?" Kathy's father replies, "I don't know." Kathy's mother joins Eddie and Kathy's father, and informs them, "they're taking her upstairs for a few more tests." Kathy's father mentions, "well, all we can do is wait." They tell Eddie that he should go home, but he isn't going anywhere.

After a few hours, the doctor meets with Kathy's parents. The doctor tells them that they won't know anything definite until the morning. The doctor suggests that they keep Kathy overnight for observation. Kathy's parents agree that would be the best thing to do. Kathy's parents and Eddie stay with Kathy until visiting hours are over.

The next day, Eddie skips school, and rides his bicycle to the hospital. He noticed yesterday that the visiting hours begin at 9:00 a.m., which is when he arrives. Eddie finds Kathy's room, and walks in. Kathy exclaims, "Eddie! I was just wishing you were here!" Eddie gives Kathy a kiss, and asks, "did they find out anything yet?" Kathy replies, "if they did, I'm sure that I'd be the last to know." Kathy asks, "aren't you supposed to be in school?" Eddie tells her, "yeah. But, you're more important. I just skipped school today." Kathy and Eddie talk for a while, interrupted a few times by the nurse who makes a few notations on Kathy's chart.

Kathy's parents arrive an hour after Eddie. They are surprised to see Eddie talking with Kathy since he is supposed to be in school. They're just glad to see that Eddie's presence makes Kathy a little happier. Wasting no time, Kathy asks her parents, "well, do they know what's wrong with me?" Kathy's father tells her, "no. Not just yet. We just spoke with the doctor. As we speak, the hematologist is looking over your test results. They should know something real soon."

Kathy comments, "I wish Mr. Frazier was here." Kathy's mom asks, "why Mr. Frazier? How would he help?" Kathy tells her, "he'd have his stopwatch on them, telling them they're not moving fast enough." Eddie comments, "for that matter, you might as well bring Braden in too." Eddie's mother asks, "okay, now tell me why Braden?" Kathy replies, "because he's the chief ass kicker. He'll get them moving faster." Kathy then mentions, "and, if Mr. Zunde was here, he would tell the doctors that they're not even qualified to get out of bed in the morning." Kathy's father, knowing Mr. Zunde well, asks, "did Dr. Zunde actually say that?" Kathy replies, "yeah. He said that to Mr. Crum once. Me and Paula overheard it." Kathy's father replies, "well, I can't argue with that."

Kathy's father tells her, "I'm at least glad to see your sense of humor has returned." Kathy replies, "at least I have one." Kathy's father asks, "what do you mean?" Kathy explains, "when they were drawing my blood, I told the nurse, 'I heard that, if you're going to draw blood, you should use a red crayon.' And, she told me, 'just sit still, and don't talk.' She didn't even think that was funny." At least Kathy's parents and Eddie have a sense of humor. They laughed at Kathy's little joke.

Another hour goes by, and the hematologist finally walks into Kathy's room with Kathy's doctor. Kathy's father asks, "do we know anything more?" The hematologist replies, "yes. I found out what Kathy has, but I don't know exactly why she has it." Kathy, wanting to know, exclaims, "what is it? What do I have?" The hematologist tells them, "it's called hemolytic anemia. What that means is that Kathy's red blood cells are bursting in her blood stream. Once they burst, they're gone. That is why her blood test results were atypical."

The hematologist goes on to explain to Kathy, "the reason you can't exert yourself is because the oxygen carrying capacity of your blood, right now, is severely diminished. That explains why you were able to sprint for a few yards, but during a longer distance, you collapsed. That also explains why you probably feel like you are ready to run a race right now. It's because your body is not under any oxygen deficit at the moment. If you try to run any distance, you'll find out very quickly that you can't." Dr. Karakova, who is an exercise physiologist, comments, "finally! Something that makes perfect sense."

Kathy, taking command of the situation, asks, "okay, now tell me how do we fix it?" If Kathy didn't ask, her parents would have asked the same question. The hematologist explains, "let me back up a little. Hemolytic anemia can be autoimmune, or caused by unknown factors. I don't know why Kathy has hemolytic anemia. That would be the question of the day. Some cases spontaneously resolve on their own. Other cases do not. If it gets really bad, we can give Kathy a transfusion, but I wouldn't recommend that right now. Until then, we will have to wait a while and see."

Kathy asks the hematologist, "how about track?" He replies, "I wouldn't advise that anytime soon." That is not exactly what Kathy wanted to hear, but she accepts his answer for now. Kathy likes this doctor a lot better because he, at the very least, found the real problem. The doctor tells Kathy that she can go home. He also tells her to not exert herself, and continue taking the vitamins and iron that were prescribed. Kathy is glad that she can go home, but not so happy that they really have no idea how to fix her problem.

The hematologist asks to speak to Kathy and her parents alone. Since Kathy is leaving in a few minutes, Kathy tells Eddie, “why don’t you just ride home? You rode your bike here. It will take you a while, and you’ve had a long day.” The hematologist tells Eddie, “she’ll have to rest for the remainder of the day. It’s probably best that she takes a nap when she gets home.” Eddie tells Kathy, “okay. I’ll see you tomorrow, sweetie.” Eddie kisses Kathy goodbye, gives her a hug, and heads out.

The hematologist whispers to Kathy’s parents, “unfortunately, there is some bad news. Can I see you out in the hall for a moment?” Kathy overhears the hematologist, and exclaims, “no! I want to hear it too!” Kathy’s parents agree to let Kathy hear the bad news.

The hematologist explains, “I really don’t like giving the bad news. Trust me. I’d rather be giving all good news.” Kathy quickly asks, “what’s the bad news?” Kathy wants all the information, good and bad. The hematologist replies, “hemolytic anemia is a very serious problem. Hemolytic anemia can be, and is often, fatal. Sometimes, it will resolve on its own. Most of the time, however, it doesn’t. If it gets really bad, we can give Kathy a transfusion, but that cannot go on forever.” Kathy’s mother gives Kathy a great big hug, as both of them start crying.

Kathy starts crying her heart out, exclaiming, “I don’t want to die yet!” Kathy’s mom and dad hug their daughter, holding her tightly. Kathy’s mom, crying as she holds her daughter, tells her, “we’ll find an answer for you, honey.” Kathy cries her heart out for quite a while, wishing now that she had not sent Eddie away.

The hematologist steps aside with Kathy’s father, and explains, “I hate to give this kind of news, but Kathy has less than a year at best, unless it spontaneously resolves. The good news is that Kathy is young and otherwise healthy. That gives her the best chance of recovery.” Kathy’s father is heartbroken. Kathy is his only child. Kathy’s father asks, “is there anything we can do?” The hematologist replies, “the best I can tell her to do at home is to avoid stress, and eat a good diet.” Kathy’s father explains, “her diet is a whole lot better than most people’s. But, that principal at the high school has been the source of an enormous amount of stress recently.” Kathy, referring to her father’s comment about Mr. Crum, interjects, “I heard that!”

After a while, Kathy’s parents take her home. Since Kathy didn’t sleep too well the night before, she just wants to go home, eat, and go to sleep. No one sleeps well in a hospital anyway, especially after being poked and prodded by intellectual porcupines all day long. Likewise, no one sleeps well after receiving the kind of news that Kathy got from the hematologist. But, Kathy is a fighter. She is not about to give up that easily.

The next day, Eddie stops at Kathy's house on the way to school. He's not sure whether Kathy is going to school today, but he quickly finds out that she will be. Kathy's mom thanks Eddie for driving to school with Kathy. She tells Eddie that it is better for Kathy if she is not left alone in the car or walking by herself. She explains that it's not that they expect anything to happen, but no one expected what happened on the track either. Kathy, at the last moment, decides to walk to school today, telling Eddie that, if something happens, he could always carry her on his shoulders. Kathy can't bring herself to tell Eddie that she is probably going to die. But, Kathy is not planning on dying, for she is a fighter.

When Kathy and Eddie arrive at school, the tribe is glad to see Kathy. The good news is she's back. The bad news is she is not allowed to run track. Kathy has to explain a dozen times what happened to her but, as long as everyone has a caring attitude, it doesn't matter how many times she has to explain it. Kathy hopes that Mr. Frazier will let her help out with the team as a team assistant like she used to do, even though she can't run right now. Everyone heads to class, and will meet again at lunch and later at tryouts.

The tribe waits around in the hallway after school for Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde to meet the athletes. The team heads downstairs to the arena for the last day of tryouts. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier ask Kathy how she's doing. Kathy replies, "I'm doing great as long as I don't run, which totally sucks." Mr. Frazier tells Kathy, "you still have a place on the team when you are able to run. I'm keeping you on the roster anyway." Kathy is happy that Mr. Frazier did not cut her from the team.

Kathy asks Mr. Frazier, "can I help out with the team until I can run again?" Mr. Frazier tells her, "you certainly can! You're the heartbeat of this team." Mr. Frazier's comment made Kathy, Paula, Eddie, and Mark all cry. Eddie, Mark, and Paula all give Kathy a group hug.

Mr. Frazier has the team sit on the bleachers as he goes over today's agenda. Mr. Frazier tells the team that, today, they will be practicing the relay events. Mr. Frazier calls Eddie, Mark, Paula, Tessa, and Kathy up, who will demonstrate how a relay race is run. Mr. Frazier tells them they will run a 4 by 220 relay. He instructs the athletes on the bleachers to watch carefully when the handoff is made. Mr. Frazier tells them that Kathy will be explaining exactly what is happening when it happens.

Jimmy O'Brien mentions to someone, "why is Eddie even here? He missed practice yesterday." O'Brien, who was cut from the team, for some reason decided to show up at tryouts. But, unfortunately for O'Brien, Mr. Frazier heard his comment. Mr. Frazier, ticked off at Jimmy O'Brien, exclaims, "O'Brien! Eddie is the fastest guy in the State! It's none of your business why Eddie wasn't at practice yesterday!"

Mr. Frazier then announces, “Jimmy O’Brien and Axel Braden, please come up here!” Mr. Frazier informs the athletes that Braden will hand off the baton to O’Brien. O’Brien is naive enough to think that this is his moment of glory. Braden and the tribe, however, know that O’Brien is one step closer to getting his ass kicked.

Mr. Frazier tells O’Brien to stand in the transition zone. Kathy has to show O’Brien where the transition zone is. Mr. Frazier gives the baton to Braden, and whispers, “don’t cut him any slack.” Mr. Frazier announces, “Braden will run 220 yards, and hand off to O’Brien. We’ll see how it goes. Watch the handoff very carefully.” Mr. Frazier gives Braden the signal to go.

Braden sprints around the track, and approaches the transition zone at full speed. O’Brien hesitates on his start. O’Brien, who should be looking forward and running at full speed, is looking back at Braden and barely moving. Braden attempts to hand off to O’Brien, whose hand is in front of him, not even remotely close to where it should be to receive the baton. Braden shoves the baton into O’Brien’s Gluteus maximus muscle, and lets it fall to the floor. O’Brien stumbles, landing on the floor, lying there as the athletes on the bleachers laugh at the handoff. Mr. Frazier announces, “that is exactly why O’Brien has been cut from the team! O’Brien! For the second time, you are cut! Get off the floor, and head to the locker room! And, don’t you ever dare to question my decisions again!” O’Brien, who is slow to get up, limps off the track and heads to the locker room.

Mr. Frazier announces, “and now, Eddie, Mark, Paula, and Tessa are going to show how it’s really done!” Mr. Frazier hands a different baton to Mark. No one wants to touch the baton that O’Brien failed to grab. Mr. Frazier comments under his breath, “we’ll have to run that baton through the cafeteria dishwasher to sterilize it.” A few athletes hear Mr. Frazier’s comment, and laugh.

Mr. Frazier hits the buzzer and Mark runs with the baton. Kathy calls the play by play, as Paula steps into the transition zone. As Mark approaches the transition zone, Paula takes off. The seamless transition occurred very fast, with absolutely no break in either runner’s cadence. Tessa gets into the transition zone next, and takes off as Paula approaches. The handoff again occurs flawlessly. Eddie is next to get on the track. As Tessa approaches, Eddie takes off and receives the baton. Eddie completes his lap, as the entire relay team made the relay race look ridiculously easy. Mr. Frazier announces, “now, that’s the way it is done! Unless you can run a relay race with that type of precision, you will never win.”

Mr. Frazier goes over the technical details on how to transfer the baton from one person to another. Mr. Frazier tells Kathy to demonstrate the proper handoff technique in slow motion, handing off to Eddie. Kathy and Eddie make several transitions as the runners study the technique. Kathy is very happy to help with the team again. She forgot how much she missed working with the runners, especially Eddie. Kathy is reassured that the Exercise Science degree she will pursue after high school is her right career path.

Mr. Frazier then instructs the runners to get on the track and explains how the relay drill will be carried out. Mr. Frazier announces, “you will not be on the clock. That does not mean you have permission to jog. I will be looking at how well you handoff and receive the baton. Kathy will be watching for any break in your cadence. And, we will be taking notes. Just get out there and do your best.”

The team practices the drills for the next hour. Mr. Frazier, for the most part, has decided who is running which events. Mr. Frazier pulls Paula, who also used to be a team assistant, out of the drills. Mr. Frazier explains to her, “I have a problem. I have no one to take Kathy’s place while she is out. I’m going to see if I can convince Erika to try out for the team. I want you to fill in for me for a few minutes.” Paula replies, “I’d be glad to.” Paula takes Mr. Frazier’s place and, along with Kathy, watches the handoffs.

Mr. Frazier pulls Erika aside, and tells her, “I have a problem. Kathy is not able to run for a while. I desperately need someone to take her place.” Before Mr. Frazier could finish, Erika interrupts and says, “and, so you want me to do it?” Mr. Frazier replies, “that’s what I was getting to.” Erika replies, “I’d be glad to, if you think I’m good enough.” Mr. Frazier tells Erika, “let’s clock you in the 40-yard dash and see.” Mr. Frazier already knows that Erika is fast enough. He just wants to see how fast she really is.

Mr. Frazier pulls Hoffer and Tessa out of the relay drills, and prepares a race between them and Erika. Mr. Frazier chose Hoffer and Tessa because they would provide good competition for Erika. If Mr. Frazier put Erika up against Eddie and Mark, she would have absolutely no chance of winning. Under those circumstances, she might not run at her best.

Tessa helps Erika set the blocks, and the runners are ready to run. Mr. Frazier explains to Erika how the race is started. Erika understands well, as she was watching carefully a few days ago during tryouts. He tells Erika to warm up and to let him know when she is ready.

Once Erika is warmed up, Mr. Frazier announces, “on your marks.” He then announces, “set.” Mr. Frazier sounds the buzzer, and the three

runners are off. Much to Mr. Frazier's surprise, Erika appears to have taken an early lead. Mr. Frazier, however, is at the finish line and, because of his vantage point, he is not 100 percent sure. At twenty yards, he now knows Erika is ahead. Hoffer and Tessa are nearly tied, but Mr. Frazier has his eyes on Erika. As she approaches the finish line, Mr. Frazier, with his stopwatch, is ready to catch her time. Mr. Frazier clocks Erika at 5.4 seconds, as she beats both Tessa and Hoffer. Erika asks, "is that good enough to be on the team?" Mr. Frazier tells her, "yes! That was very good. Now, I'd like to see what you can do in the 440-yard dash."

Mr. Frazier halts the relay drill for a few minutes as Erika gets ready to run the 440-yard dash. He tells the runners to take a short break. He adds Paula to the 440-yard dash, now having four runners in the race. Erika asks, "how many laps is this race?" Mr. Frazier tells her, "two laps. And, when you're running, you'll stay in your assigned lane during the entire race." Erika asks, "is this one a sprint too?" Mr. Frazier tells her, "yes. But, it's a very long one."

Mr. Frazier assigns Erika to lane one, and for a very good reason. In lane one, it will appear to Erika that she is far behind everyone else, and she will run faster. Once Kathy and Barbara have the blocks set up for the race, the runners get ready to run. Mr. Frazier, who will be only timing Erika, tells her, "don't let anyone beat you."

Mr. Frazier announces, "on your marks." He then announces, "set." Mr. Frazier sounds the buzzer, and everyone is out of the blocks. Erika sprints, starting out as she did in the 40-yard dash, getting off to a good start. During the first lap, it appears that Erika is closing in on Tessa, who is in lane three. Paula, in lane four, is in the lead and is expected to win. During the second lap, an interesting development takes place. Erika is side by side with Tessa, and gaining on Hoffer. At that moment, Mr. Frazier knows that he has another Amazon woman for the team. As they approach the finish, Paula finishes first, but not far behind her is Erika. Erika finishes in second place, Hoffer in third place, and Tessa in fourth place. Mr. Frazier looks at his stopwatch, and exclaims, "she ran a 57.4 second quarter! A 57.4! Did everyone see that?" Running a quarter mile in 57.4 seconds is not bad for someone who does not run.

After the race, Erika tells Mr. Frazier, "well, I almost won." Mr. Frazier tells Erika, "you did excellent! That was an awesome run!" Erika asks, "so, I can be on the team?" Mr. Frazier tells her, "yes! You can be on the team! And, you can be on the team in the Spring if you want!" Well, that is if the swimming team does not steal her. It is easy to believe that Erika could win an award for being the most naive person in school. Perhaps she is, but everyone loves her anyway, except for Chuckie.

Back on the bleachers, Kathy is sitting with Eddie. Kathy has her head on Eddie's shoulder, sad that she cannot run with the team. A tear rolls down Kathy's cheek, as she tells Eddie, "I guess I'm not needed anymore." Eddie holds her tightly, telling her, "oh sweetie, you're needed! The team needs you. I need you. And, I love you!" Eddie's words and hug let Kathy know that she is really needed. Kathy not only heard what Eddie said, but she felt it through to her heart. Kathy remembers her song, *When You Say Nothing at All*, sung by Allison Krauss, that she and Eddie heard on the beach a while ago.

The relay drills begin again. Eddie doesn't feel like participating in the drills, so he sits with Kathy. After a while, they leave practice early. Since it's easy to get lost in the crowd during the relay drills, it takes a while for anyone to notice that Eddie is gone. Since Kathy was helping Mr. Frazier, her absence was noticed immediately. Mr. Frazier thought that perhaps she wasn't feeling well, and left to go home. Mr. Frazier figures it's best to let Eddie be with Kathy right now.

With track tryouts now over, the season will begin shortly. Mr. Frazier will have a lot of work ahead assigning the runners to the relay events. Many of the events have already been assigned, but some have not. Most of the relay teams have yet to be finalized, with only the 4 by 440 relay and the mile medley teams being fully assigned. Mr. Frazier must assign events to win as many meets as possible. At the same time, he must get as many athletes as possible to the State invitational meet. With Kathy gone, the task is more difficult than it sounds.

After practice, Eddie and Kathy walk home together. It's a sad day for Kathy, not being able to be part of the team like she so hoped for. But, Kathy and Eddie are optimistic that she'll be able to return sometime during the season, if not, by Spring. On the way home, Kathy tells Eddie, "I'm sorry I broke down." Eddie tells Kathy, "It's not your fault. Don't blame yourself. You'll get better."

Kathy stops, and puts her head on Eddie's shoulder, and starts to cry. Kathy tells him, "it's been four months now, and I'm getting worse, not better." Eddie asks, "how do you know?" Kathy explains, "I can't even make it through the day anymore. I want to go to sleep at eight o'clock and I don't want to get out of bed in the morning. And, I'm tired all the time." Eddie asks, "did you tell the doctor?" Kathy tells him, "yeah. And, all they keep saying is, 'give it more time,' and, 'wait a little longer.' The only thing that waiting is doing is making it worse."

When they get to Kathy's house, Eddie stays with her for a while. They sit together, as Kathy tries to do her homework. But, she doesn't get much done because her mind is elsewhere. After a while, Kathy just wants to hear her song. With her mom in the kitchen making dinner,

Kathy plays *The Power of Love*, by Céline Dion. Kathy does not seem to care that the song is from the future. This is the first time she's ever played the song in her mother's presence.

Eddie and Kathy dance to her song, which always makes her feel really good. Kathy's mom mentions, "that's a really nice song. Who is that?" Kathy replies, "it's Eddie's. He bought it," which he did. But, then he gave it to Kathy. Kathy successfully avoided explaining a future copy of *The Power of Love* to her mom.

Once dinner is ready, Eddie heads home. Eddie kisses Kathy goodbye, telling her, "I'll be here early tomorrow morning, and we'll walk together." Eddie gives Kathy a big hug, telling her, "and remember, you're needed." Kathy squeezes him back, and doesn't want to let go. But, Kathy has to go in and eat dinner, and Eddie has to go home. Eddie walks to the sidewalk, beginning the long walk home that he has made many times.