

Eddie, The Junior Year

Chapter Four The Winter Season's End

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Eddie and Kathy return to school the following Monday. The tribe hangs out in the lobby for a while, as Kathy does not hear any hint from anyone that she was ill. The front door that Eddie destroyed last Thursday looks in good repair. Mr. Crum even walks through the lobby and, seeing Eddie, does not start instigating a clash. Kathy, testing what Paula told her, tells Braden, "I'm beginning to taste my pizza." Braden replies, "it's not even in the oven! The season ain't over yet!" Eddie and Kathy head to class, wondering what may be in store for them there. Most everything, so far, is like they remember it.

After school, Eddie and Kathy head to track practice. They meet in the arena, and sit on the bleachers. As the team gathers, Kathy notices nothing unusual. Kathy tells Eddie, "I can't wait to get on the track and see what I can do." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "everything else about you is back to normal. You'll do good."

Erika and Tessa have a seat with Eddie and Kathy. Erika asks, "well, are you guys ready?" Kathy asks, "for what?" Erika tells her, "for today's competition." Eddie replies, "yeah, we're ready." Eddie is always ready for a competition. Kathy is also always ready. Kathy and Eddie don't know what they're ready for but, if it has anything to do with track and field, they're more than ready for it.

Mark and Paula walk in, and also have a seat with Eddie and Kathy. Kathy whispers to Paula, "what are we doing today?" Paula whispers back, "competing with each other. Mr. Frazier says the State competition will be tougher this year, especially in the relays." Kathy asks, "what am I doing?" Paula replies, "he hasn't told us what we're doing yet." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "that's good. We'll just ride with the tide and go with the flow."

Mr. Frazier walks in, and begins by going over the day's agenda. Mr. Frazier organizes several relay events, which are the 4 by 110, 4 by 220, 4 by 440, and 4 by 880 relays. All relay teams will be running in each event. He tells the relay teams that he will be looking for any way possible to improve performance, since the competition has stepped up their game. Mr. Frazier also mentions that anyone not on a relay team will also be running in today's competition, and that he has assigned them to a team for today's contest. After all, the Spring season is right around the corner, and there is always next year. Mr. Frazier may discover some hidden talent among the team. Mr. Frazier tells everyone to get up, get on the track, and warm up.

Eddie tells Kathy, "we can handle this." Kathy tells him, "Eddie, you don't know how happy I am right now! I'm getting back on the track!" Kathy and Eddie get off the bleachers and, just as Kathy said, "I'm getting back on the track," Mr. Frazier tells them, "the 4 by 110 relay is first. You will run in your normal order for your event." Mark takes the baton from Wendy. Paula tells Kathy, "you're still third." Kathy is excited and apprehensive at the same time, wondering how well she can sprint. The last time Kathy remembers being on this track, she was carried away in an ambulance.

Mr. Frazier announces, "on your marks." He then announces, "set." Mr. Frazier sounds the buzzer, and everyone is out of the blocks. Although this is not his event, Mark quickly takes the lead. The first 110 yards go by very fast, and Mark hands off to Paula. Paula runs her leg, and maintains the lead. Kathy is waiting on the track as Paula comes around the curve. Paula hands off to Kathy, and Kathy takes off like lightning, letting out her primal scream. Kathy sprints around the track with more energy than she has felt in a long, long time. Before she knows it, Eddie is in front of her, waiting for the baton. Kathy enters the transition zone, and hands off to Eddie. Eddie, whose team is in the lead, takes off, and will win.

Meanwhile, as Eddie is running his leg, Kathy is jumping up and down, exclaiming, "I did it! I did it! I did good!" Everyone who sees Kathy is at a loss to understand why she is so excited today. Her elated mood catches Mr. Frazier's attention, prompting him to shout out to everyone, "that's the kind of attitude that will get you to State! Look at her! That's what I like to see!" Kathy runs up to Eddie, exclaiming, "I'm back!" Eddie and Kathy briefly celebrate with Mark and Paula, not only for winning the race, but because Kathy is back on the team. The remainder of the relay events go well for Kathy, who will sleep well tonight.

After practice, Kathy and Eddie walk home together. Kathy tells Eddie, "maybe I'll drive to school tomorrow. I just wanted to make sure that I was okay before I drove. One time, when I drove to school, my mom and

dad had to come and get my car.” Eddie tells her, “I kind of like walking.” Kathy asks, “why? It’s cold outside.” Eddie tells her, “when you drive, we can’t take the long way home.” Kathy exclaims, “oh yeah, we can!” Eddie asks, “how is that?” Kathy tells him, “hey! You said, ‘how is that?’ That’s what I always say!” Eddie asks, “well, are you going to tell me?” Kathy replies, “I’ll show you, but not now. It’s a surprise.”

When they get to Kathy’s house, Kathy calls it an early night. She can finally sleep again, without the anxiety she’s had over the last few months. Eddie and Kathy both need a rest. Even though they were dropped back into a different world than the one they left, what they both experienced over the last few months is real. It is real to them, but not to everyone else. That evening, Kathy reflects on what changed that allowed her future to change. Some thought or action must have caused the change in her future path. She thinks through this over and over, but may never know the answer.

The following weekend, Kathy wants to go forward to the future with Eddie. Having a few questions, she wants to go back to see the doctor who explained why she got sick. While she can’t exactly explain to Eddie why she wants to go forward again, she knows she has to. Eddie and Kathy meet on Saturday morning, and head to the portal. Kathy confidently rides her bicycle once again, leading the way. When they arrive at the portal, Kathy picks the date Nov. 1, 2011 at 10:00 a.m.

They arrive into the future, but this trip will be very different. They ride their bicycles on the path to its end. Turning left, they head down the road in the direction of Angelo’s Service Station. When the station comes into view, Kathy tells Eddie, “hey! The sign says, ‘Eddie’s Service Station’.” Eddie tells Kathy, “it did last time too.” Kathy tells him, “oh yeah. I almost forgot. I was like half dead last time I was here.” As they approach the station, Eddie tells Kathy, “something looks different.” Kathy asks, “do you want to go and look?” Eddie replies, “sure.”

They ride into the service station, which appears quite different from the last visit. The first thing that Eddie notices is that there are much fewer cars in the lot. As they approach the door, the sign indicates the hours are Monday through Wednesday, from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. Eddie is surprised at the station’s hours. The last he remembers, the station was open from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., six days a week. Not knowing what to expect, they walk into the office.

The mechanic walks from the service area into the office to greet Eddie, seeing that Kathy is with him. The mechanic tells Eddie, “I see you brought Kathy today!” Eddie replies, “yeah. She’s all better.” The mechanic replies, “oh, you must have come from right after the time when

Kathy was sick.” Kathy mentions, “sick wasn’t even the word for it.” The mechanic tells Kathy, “yeah, I remember that.” This is the second time the mechanic has seen Kathy come from the past. The mechanic tells Eddie, “I was just opening up.”

The mechanic then tells Kathy, “I have a surprise for you.” Kathy replies, “I hope it’s a good one.” The mechanic tells Kathy, “turn around.” Kathy turns around, and looks out the front window. Pulling up into the station is her Porsche 914, which she immediately recognizes. Kathy exclaims, “hey! That’s my Porsche!” The mechanic tells Kathy, “yeah. And, it needs an oil change.” When the car gets closer, the mechanic tells Kathy, “look inside!” Kathy looks inside the 914, and sees a blonde woman, wearing Yoga pants, in excellent physical condition getting out of the car. Kathy screams out, “is that me?” The mechanic replies, “yeah! That’s you.” Kathy cries, and hugs Eddie, and exclaims, “I made it! I didn’t die! I really made it!”

Kathy’s future counterpart, the mechanic’s wife, walks into the office. Kathy exclaims, “wow! It’s me! Eddie, it’s me!” Kathy and the mechanic’s wife hug each other. This is the second time Kathy got to hug herself. The first time was when they took care of Paul Mahoney a while ago. Kathy, who is overly excited, tells the mechanic’s wife, “I just got better last week. I was all sick, and we went into the past, and then I didn’t take the antibiotic.” The mechanic’s wife tells Kathy, “yeah, I remember that. That really sucked. I thought I was going to die. Dang dead frogs.” Kathy tells Eddie, “wow! She really is me!”

Kathy tells the mechanic’s wife, “I came back to go and see the doctor again. I need to find out how to make what happened never happen again.” The mechanic’s wife tells Kathy, “I can tell you that. Take the same vitamins Eddie takes, and definitely probiotics. And forget the antibiotics. Use natural products. It’s that simple.” The mechanic’s wife adds, “oh, oh, oh! And watch out for dead frogs!”

The mechanic’s wife tells Kathy, “if you go back to the doctor right now, we have a problem.” Kathy asks, “what’s that?” The mechanic’s wife tells Kathy, “I go there. There’s not exactly a whole lot of people with the name Katarina in this town that are six feet tall, with blonde hair and our build. He might think we’re related.” The mechanic’s wife adds, assuring Kathy, “but, don’t worry. Just take Eddie’s vitamins and the probiotics. You’ll be fine.”

Almost as an afterthought, the mechanic’s wife tells Kathy and Eddie, “oh yeah! And, don’t let that Mr. Crum give either of you any problems. Don’t be the least bit afraid of him. Mr. Zunde has your back.” The mechanic’s wife whispers to Kathy, “don’t put up with any of Mr. Crum’s shit, especially after you graduate. Trust me. He’s going to be after you

again. Just put that little piece of shit in his place.” Kathy now has absolutely no fear of Mr. Crum.

Kathy whispers to the mechanic’s wife, “I can’t find my blue stone. Can you tell me where it went to? It would save me a lot of trouble looking for it.” The mechanic’s wife replies, “I never found it. I looked everywhere.” Kathy mentions, “then, maybe I’ll find another one someday.” The mechanic’s wife explains, “if you do find one, something’s changed. I went to the same place and looked for one over and over again. But, I never found another one.” Kathy replies, “that’s really sad.”

Kathy notices the song on the radio, and listens as it is playing. She asks, “okay, can someone please tell me what is playing now?” The mechanic listens to the song, and tells her, “that’s *It Must Have Been Love*. It’s one of Roxette’s songs.” Kathy asks, “her name is Roxette?” The mechanic replies, “no. That’s the group name. The song has been around for a while.” The mechanic’s wife tells Kathy, “the singer’s name is Marie Fredriksson. I really like her music.” Kathy says, “as of now, so do I.” Kathy turns toward Eddie, telling him, “Eddie, I’ve got to have that song! It’s exactly what I was feeling when I was sick.” Eddie tells her, “we’ll go back to the record store and get it for you.” The mechanic’s wife tells Eddie and Kathy, “I actually remember when we did that!”

Kathy has gotten all the answers she came for. They all take a trip together to the doctor’s office and the nutrition store to get a supply of supplements for Kathy. On the way, Eddie finds out that the mechanic only works three and a half days a week. He can be busier, but now that Kathy has made it, they spend much of their time together instead of working. Eddie and Kathy also find out that Mark and Paula eventually will get married. This is Eddie and Kathy’s secret. They’ll let Mark and Paula figure it out themselves. After getting the vitamins and supplements, they all then arrive back at the station.

Kathy and Eddie then head to the portal. On the way, Kathy tells Eddie, “we have to stop and get that song.” They take the side trip, and arrive at the record store.

Kathy walks in, and notices the store is quite different than the last time she was there. She asks the clerk, “do you have *It Must Have Been Love*, by Roxette? I need the 45.” The clerk asks her, “do you want the Christmas version, or the one from the movie?” Kathy asks, “what’s the difference?” The clerk tells her, “only one word. The popular version has the words, ‘Winter’s day,’ and the Christmas version has the words ‘Christmas day.’ It was originally a Christmas song, called *Christmas For The Broken-Hearted*. They remade the song for the movie *Pretty Woman*, and renamed it to *It Must Have Been Love*.” Kathy replies, “the one I heard

was *It Must Have Been Love*. I'll get that one." The clerk tells her, "let me check. If we have the 45, it's in the back."

While the clerk is away, Kathy tells Eddie, "that was me. Laying in bed and all brokenhearted. That song described what I felt to a tee." The clerk returns with the 45, and hands it to Kathy. Kathy exclaims, "awesome! Thank you so much!" They check out, and Kathy leaves with her third song from the future.

They make their way to the portal, ride through, and return to their time. When they return, Kathy tells Eddie, "wow! Now we can start our day." Eddie tells her, "it's Saturday! We can get pizza later." Kathy replies, "and, I can take my new vitamins. Who knows? Maybe I'll run faster than you!" They ride to Kathy's house. As usual, Kathy's parents are not home on Saturday morning, and are out running errands.

Kathy tells Eddie, "I want to listen to my new song." Eddie tells Kathy, "when it was playing, I didn't really get a chance to listen to all the words." Kathy plays *It Must Have Been Love*, by Roxette, and tells Eddie, "sit back with me, and hold my hand. We'll listen together." Kathy listens, recalling every memory in her mind that she had when she was laying in bed, thinking that she was dying. Eddie listens to the words, getting a glimpse of what Kathy felt when she was all alone in bed. When the song is over, they both have tears rolling down their cheeks. Kathy tells Eddie, "that's what I felt like. I found love, and lost it somehow. Time was running out on me." Kathy whispers to Eddie, "but, now I feel alive again." Eddie gives Kathy a hug, understanding what Kathy felt.

Kathy puts the recording away with the other two songs she brought back from the future. She tells Eddie, "okay, now we can go and get pizza." Eddie asks, "are we walking, riding, or driving?" Kathy hesitantly tells him, "I think I'd rather walk." Eddie remarks, "you don't sound so sure about that." Kathy tells him, "I want to walk only because I can!" Eddie gets it. They walk to the pizzeria, enjoying every step. Kathy and Eddie spend the day together, walking around town because they can.

The day of the State invitational meet arrives, and Kathy picks up Eddie at his home and drives to the school. Kathy would rather walk to the school with Eddie, but expending any excess energy before the meet is counterproductive. Kathy and Eddie have no clue about this year's competition. During the season, in Kathy's alternative past, Kathy wasn't running, and missed pretty much the whole season. Eddie, more concerned about Kathy, was oblivious to everything going on around him. When they changed the future, everything changed. But, they'll have it all figured out by the day's end.

The team gets on the bus, taking the short trip to the coliseum where the meet is held. On the way, Kathy sees Braden, sitting with Wendy. Braden is assuring the team that more asses will be kicked this year than any other year. Kathy hasn't heard Braden's rants for a while, and realizes how much she's missed them. Kathy sees Mark and Paula sitting together, holding hands. She sees Barbara, who is the assistant coach, sitting with Johnson. Kathy sees Erika sitting on Bobby B's lap. Seeing all of this, Kathy feels like life is back to normal again.

Once they arrive at the coliseum, the team meets in their designated bench area. Barbara goes over the events, and the approximate time during the day that each will be run. She also fills the runners in on what is known about the competition. Barbara does this every year but, this year, Kathy is very glad to get the rundown. She's been absent all year. Kathy learns that she and Eddie will be up first in the 40-yard dash.

Barbara informs everyone that, soon after the 40-yard dash, will be the 4 by 220 relay, which will be Hoffer, Tessa, Erika, and Lena Borg, who is a senior. Lena is a swimmer but, after watching Erika and Eddie race in the pool, she decided to give track a try. Not knowing how fast she was, Lena surprised herself. Lena will be swimming again in the Spring, along with Tessa.

Barbara announces that Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula will be running in the 4 by 440 relay, which is no surprise to anyone. Barbara tells the relay team that, even though the other teams are good, they don't have any real competition this year in that particular event. She also tells them not to slack off at all because they can potentially break the State record, an opportunity they will not have next year because Kathy and Paula will graduate. Hearing what Barbara has to say, Kathy is confident that she is better than ever on the track.

Braden, Johnson, Erika, and Mitchell will be running the mile medley relay. Barbara ran in this event last year. Erika is the only change to the relay team. Erika and Johnson will each be running a 220-yard leg, Braden will be running the 440-yard leg, and Mitchell will be running the half mile.

In other individual events, Barbara announces that Braden will be running the 440-yard dash, and is the number one seed. Braden already knows this. If you ask him, he'll tell you that he was born the number one seed. In the 220-yard dash, Barbara announces that Mark and Paula will be battling it out against each other. Mitchell will be running the mile, and is expected to win. Bobby B. will be throwing the shot-put. Barbara tells Bobby B. to watch out for a new guy named Chuckie, and that he's dangerous. The entire bench gets a chuckle out of Barbara's comical comment.

As expected, Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, checks out Mr. Frazier's team. Mr. Ruff, seeing Erika at the State invitational meet, is now definitely sure that Mr. Frazier is up to something illegal. Erika looks like a bodybuilder, and that's because she is one. And, Erika came out of nowhere this year, and was invited to State in her first year of competition.

Mr. Ruff talks privately with Rudy Parker, the coach from Henderson High. Mr. Ruff tells Mr. Parker, "Mr. Frazier does this year after year. He finds these athletes that look like they are not even in high school. They seem to just come out of nowhere, and win. He must be up to something." Mr. Parker replies, "I can see that. I think you might be right about that."

Mr. Parker, who has only one athlete in the meet, Zak Ward in the mile, is concerned. Mr. Parker tells Mr. Ruff, "Frazier somehow got away with it last year. He must be paying off the officials or something. And then, they all try to make us look stupid." Mr. Ruff, seeing Barbara with Mr. Frazier's team, tells Mr. Parker, "and, there's another problem. That Amazon woman over there," pointing at Barbara, "was a senior last year. Why is she here again?" Mr. Ruff replies, "this should get interesting. Very interesting."

The call is made by the Meet Announcer for the 40-yard dash. The team wishes Eddie and Kathy good luck. Mr. Frazier, Eddie, and Kathy head to the starting line. Since they are the number one and two seeds, Eddie and Kathy are in the first heat. The rest of the heat is concerned, getting word that Eddie broke the State record in the 40-yard dash earlier this year. They are also concerned because, during one race, Kathy beat him. But, because Kathy and Eddie changed the future, Kathy missed that race, and so did Eddie. With the race about to start, Mr. Frazier moves over to the coach's area, which is located near the finish line.

The Starter tells the first heat to get ready. Eddie and Kathy set their blocks. The Starter announces, "on your marks." The runners appear to be ready, and the Starter announces, "set," as the arena goes silent. The buzzer is sounded. Eddie and Kathy are out of the blocks faster than ever.

At ten yards, Kathy and Eddie are in the lead. At twenty yards, Eddie has a slight lead over Kathy, with the rest of the field a few yards behind. Eddie crosses the finish line first, with Kathy right behind him. The rest of the field finishes with respectable times that could earn them a medal if Eddie and Kathy were not around. Mr. Frazier tells Eddie and Kathy, "that was a great run! You guys were clocking! You both did great!" Kathy and Eddie exchange a high-five, as Kathy exclaims, "I did it! Yes!"

The second heat approaches the starting line, noting the high standard to earn a spot in the final. Eddie, Kathy, and Mr. Frazier walk back to the team area. Mr. Frazier assures Eddie and Kathy that they will both be in the final. Mr. Frazier tells the group, "next up is the 4 by 220 relay. Hoffer, Tessa, Erika, and Lena, start stretching and get ready." Wendy informs the 4 by 220 relay team that they will be in lane two, and will have about fifteen or twenty minutes to get ready.

The final for the 40-yard dash will be coming up in a while, so Eddie and Kathy sit back and relax. Kathy tells Eddie, "you better watch out! I'm fast!" Eddie tells Kathy, "yeah, I know. I heard Mr. Frazier mention that you're close to breaking the woman's State record." Kathy replies, "wow! I am fast."

Out of the blue, Kathy exclaims, "hey, listen! The Amazon chant!" Eddie and Kathy look out onto the track, and see Hoffer, Tessa, Erika, and Lena preparing to run the 4 by 220 relay event. Eddie mentions, "look at that! Hoffer and his harem." Kathy starts laughing, and tells Eddie, "you're so bad. But, that's really funny!"

After the race, Mr. Frazier returns to the bench with the 4 by 220 relay team, exclaiming, "they might have a shot at gold!" There are a few more heats to go, so everyone will have to wait and see. Kathy and Eddie give Hoffer, and his relay team members, a high-five. Kathy tells them, "you guys were really fast!" Hoffer tells Kathy, "that was our best time all year!" Eddie gives Hoffer another high-five, telling him, "it looks like you might have taken it." Erika, now that she has a break, mentions, "I'm going to go and see how Bobby is doing in the shot-put." Kathy whispers to Eddie, "well, that's one thing that hasn't changed."

Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, who has way too much time on his hands, comes over to say hello to Mr. Frazier. Mr. Ruff jokes, and asks, "how did you make out in the Amazon this year?" Mr. Frazier, remembering the controversy last year, replies, "I was able to get Paula's sister out of the Amazon. She'll probably make it to State next year. Oh, and I found a distance runner in Nigeria. He'll be running in the Spring. His name is Adekunle Akinmola. He's almost as fast as Barbara and Mitchell. Watch out for him." That's all Mr. Ruff needed to hear. Now, Mr. Frazier is allegedly finding runners from Africa too. Mr. Ruff tells Mr. Frazier, "yeah, I'll definitely watch out for him." Mr. Ruff, instead of going to his bench, walks over and talks with Mr. Parker at the Henderson bench.

A while after Mr. Ruff leaves, Mitchell asks Mr. Frazier, "what's this about a runner from Nigeria?" Mr. Frazier tells Mitchell, "he's a transfer student. He'll be starting in the Spring semester." Mr. Frazier suddenly has the whole team's attention. Mr. Frazier continues, "his family moved

here last week from Nigeria. The father came to meet Mr. Zunde and myself a few months ago, wanting to make sure the school had a good track team. Apparently, track is important to the whole family. I never thought anything more about it, until last week, when they registered him for the Spring semester. I got to meet him. He seems like a nice guy." Mark asks, "what year is he?" Mr. Frazier replies, "he's a sophomore." Mark asks, "is he any good?" Mr. Frazier replies, "they claim he is. We'll all have to wait until Spring tryouts to find out." Mark asks, "what's his name?" Mr. Frazier replies, "Adekunle Akinmola. Learn how to pronounce it. Adekunle Akinmola."

The call for the one-mile run is made. Mitchell walks to the starting line with Mr. Frazier and Barbara. On the way, Barbara tells Mitchell, "remember, you can win this and you know how to win this. This is your year. Go for it." Barbara has a point. Being able to win, and knowing how to win, are two completely different things. Mr. Frazier also reminds Mitchell, "the last 440 yards are where the race is won or lost. Make them run your race. Don't let them make you run theirs." The only difference between any of the distance races is how much of a warm-up you'll get before the last 440 yards. Strategy is of utmost importance in any distance race.

The one-mile run begins, and Mitchell finds his preferred position in second place. Mitchell maintains second place during the first three-quarters of a mile, when not many positional changes occur. During the last quarter mile, the lead runner, John McNamara from Centerville, begins to make a move. Mitchell follows closely behind, not wanting to have too much distance to make up. With 220 yards to go, Mitchell is paying close attention to McNamara, the runner directly in front of him, who begins to slightly slow his pace.

With 150 yards to go, Mitchell perceives that McNamara is getting fatigued. Mitchell makes his move, and sprints with as much energy as he can to the finish line. With 100 yards to go, Mitchell passes the leader. Mitchell crosses the finish line first, taking the gold medal. In second place is McNamara. Third place goes to Zak Ward from Henderson High, finally winning a medal at the State invitational meet. Ward thinks he was cheated out of a medal last year because one of Mr. Frazier's Amazon women, Barbara, won the race. Ward's coach, Mr. Parker, still thinks Barbara was somehow ineligible to run.

The call for the 40-yard dash final is made. Eddie and Kathy are now up. Eddie is in lane three, and Kathy in lane four. The lane assignments indicate that they had the best times during the preliminaries.

At the starting line, Eddie asks Kathy, "whose turn is it to win this time?" Kathy tells him, "mine. I need the money." Eddie tells her, "we get

three thousand if we win, and two thousand for second place. I'm okay on money for now, so I can give you a thousand. I just want the medal." Kathy gives Eddie a high-five and exclaims, "deal!"

The rest of the runners hear Eddie and Kathy's conversation, all for the first time. Eddie and Kathy used a similar dialog last Spring during the State invitational meet in the 100-yard dash final. It worked well then, so they figure they can recycle it, since today's finalists are different.

Eddie and Kathy's dialog provokes a discussion among some of the other finalists. One finalist asks Kathy, "so, you guys get paid?" Kathy replies, "more than you'd think. But, it doesn't matter to you guys anyway." The finalist gets perturbed, and asks Kathy, "what makes you say that?" Kathy replies, "in order to collect the winnings, you have to win. You're not going to win. So, as I said, it doesn't matter to you." Another finalist reports the alleged violation to the Starter. The Starter is familiar with Northside's pre-race tactics, and ignores the complaint.

Without any delay, the Starter announces, "on your marks." The Starter then 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. Kathy is right behind him. At twenty yards, Eddie and Kathy already have the race in their pocket. They are now fighting it out between themselves for the gold medal. The field of the four other runners is too close to call. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, taking the gold medal again this year. Second place goes to Kathy, who has just delivered the best performance of her career. Third place goes to Duane Harris, who Eddie and Kathy beat last Spring in the 100-yard dash. Harris is getting very tired of being beaten by Eddie and Kathy.

At the finish, Mr. Frazier congratulates Eddie and Kathy, giving them a high-five. Mr. Frazier exclaims, "Kathy may have broken the State record for women! I have it on my watch! We'll have to see what the Timekeepers have." Kathy's facial expression is nothing less than sparkling when she hears the news. Any potential time that breaks the State record is placed under review. She will have to wait until the awards ceremony for the official announcement, if any.

Eddie and Kathy now get their time to rest. They get lunch as Mark and Paula are preparing to run the 220-yard dash. After they eat, Eddie and Kathy go outside for a while, and take a walk. They return to the place they found last year to sit and relax.

Kathy mentions to Eddie, "you know that I let you win, right?" Eddie replies, "yeah. I really appreciate that." Kathy tells him, "I didn't want to make you look bad." Kathy puts her head on Eddie's chest, and they sit and relax. Kathy tells Eddie, "I want my nap. But, I don't need a nap."

There's a difference, you know." Eddie replies, "yeah, I know." Kathy falls asleep, like she did last year. Eddie lets her sleep for a while, knowing that the rest will do her good.

When she wakes up, Kathy tells Eddie, "wow! I was dreaming that Mark told McCrutchen something, and he couldn't run after that." Eddie asks, "McCrutchen can run?" Kathy replies, "well, you do have a point." Eddie then mentions, "I wonder what Mark has up his sleeve this year." Kathy replies, "I guess we're going to find out. Maybe we should think something up too!" Eddie tells her, "yeah. We'll see what we can come up with." As they stand up to walk back in, Kathy mentions, "we got to think of something. I really want another gold medal." With lunch time over, they head back inside to see how the rest of the team did.

When they get back inside, at the bench, they find out that Mark again took the gold medal in the 220-yard dash, and Paula took the bronze. Braden just won the 440-yard dash, and has still not calmed down. Braden is letting everyone know how badly he beat everyone in the race. Braden is also very happy because he now consistently breaks the 50-second barrier in the 440-yard dash. After the race, Braden was heard saying, "they might as well just give me next year's medal too!" They also get the word, directly from Bobby B. himself, that the shot doc took the gold medal in the shot-put again this year.

Eddie asks Mark, "do you have any plans to mess with McCrutchen?" Mark replies, "yeah. I'm going to use the one you gave me." Eddie, forgetting what he may have said, asks Mark, "what was that?" Mark replies, "I'm going to tell him that I'm moving to his town, and that I'll be on his team next year." Kathy tells Mark, "save that one for Spring. Me and Paula can tell McCrutchen that we'll be running for another team next year because we're seniors, and our principal won't allow us to run." Mark tells them, "awesome! Go for it! I'll save mine until the Spring." Kathy also explains, "we can also tell him that we'll all be running for another team, because they pay more." Mark thinks about this, and explains, "that will work. Bring it up and see how it flies. You never know where this stuff will go."

Later in the afternoon, the call is made for the final event, 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. That is exactly what Kathy was hoping for. If the crowd is on your side, it raises your energy level, and gives you a distinct advantage. Already at the starting line are McCutchen, and the rest of the Centerville relay team.

McCutchen, proudly standing with the rest of his relay team, brags to Mark, "we might actually beat you this year." Mark replies, "I don't care." McCutchen asks, "why not?" Mark replies to him, "because Kathy and

Paula are not going to get to run with us next year. I'm ticked off. I just don't care anymore." McCutchen exclaims, "what? What are you talking about?" Kathy explains to McCutchen, "we're seniors. Northside won't let us run after we graduate. Our principal won't allow it. He says there's too much attention paid to us already. But, someone else picked us up for next year, and we'll be running with that team."

McCutchen tells Kathy, "you can't run after you graduate anyway." Kathy tells McCutchen, "wow! Are you ever naive! Just look around you. Northside is walking away with half the gold medals in this meet. When are you ever going to get it?" One of the Centerville runners whispers to another, "she might be right." Paula adds, "look at Bobby B., our shot-put guy. He's in college. How do you think he makes his tuition money? They'll let him be on the team, but they won't let us be on it." Paula then mentions to Kathy, "if they haven't figured it out by now, they never will."

The conversation stirs up the Centerville team, but it doesn't stop there. Some of the other teams overhear the conversation between the Northside and Centerville relay teams. Many of the runners now think that the meet is rigged. With so many victories, many of them are now discussing among themselves whether Eddie and Mark are, in fact, eligible. McCutchen, and his teammates, are heard whispering to each other. Mark is also whispering, and whispers to Eddie, "hey, Paula and Kathy played them really good. That was a good one."

McCutchen, who is Centerville's anchorman this year, walks over and talks with Mr. Ruff, his coach. Mark tries to hear what that conversation is about. Mark can't exactly hear what is said, but he tells the rest of the 4 by 440 relay team, "I couldn't hear much, but I definitely heard the word shot-put." Kathy points out, "Mr. Ruff is a special kind of stupid anyway." Paula adds, "I know. He's so paranoid. It's no wonder why Mr. Frazier is now messing with him too."

Blind siding the other teams, the Starter issues the command, "on your marks." Mark is ready, but stands around giving the impression that he does not care. The Starter announces, "set." McCutchen catches Mark's lackadaisical attitude from the sidelines. The buzzer sounds, and Mark leaves the blocks. The Amazon chant gets louder, energizing Kathy and Paula. After the first lap, Mark is in the lead, but McCutchen has not even noticed. Paula gets on the track, waiting for Mark to deliver the goods.

Mark hands off to Paula, who lets out an Amazon war cry, causing many heads to turn. During Paula's first lap, no one comes close to catching her. On Paula's second lap, the Centerville runner moves up to second place. Kathy gets on the track, waiting for Paula to arrive at the transition zone. McCutchen exclaims to his teammate, who is getting on

the track, “help me out here!” McCutchen will be up against Eddie in the final leg of the race. If Kathy is still in the lead during the next handoff, that’s about it for Centerville and McCutchen. McCutchen knows he’s no match for Eddie, or anyone else on the Northside team for that matter. Paula comes out of the final curve, and Kathy is ready to run her last race of the indoor season.

Paula hands off to Kathy, who lets out her Amazon war cry. There might even be a hint of a vague competition between Kathy and Paula to see who can scream the loudest. Kathy’s primal scream results in the crowd cheering “Amazon, Amazon, Amazon!” even louder. Eddie yells out to McCutchen, “I’m going to break 50! Watch me!” McCutchen yells back, “I can break 60 too!” Eddie laughs, and replies, “I said 50, junior! Not 60!” Mark, after hearing Eddie’s exchange with McCutchen, laughs hysterically. McCutchen, seeing that Kathy is still in the lead, kicks the floor with his foot. Eddie is waiting 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 now has to deliver on the sub-50 second time that he promised. Kathy lies on the ground, watching as her sweetheart kicks everyone’s ass. Eddie is now racing against the clock. After Eddie’s first lap, Mr. Frazier tells Mark and Paula, “it looks like he’s going to deliver!” Eddie sprints the final 220 yards, with no sign of slowing down. Kathy stands up to watch Eddie, just as he crosses the finish line, taking first place. Centerville High School takes second place in this heat, with McCutchen finishing very far behind Eddie.

Eddie walks back to the relay team, where the celebration has already begun. Kathy gives Eddie a hug. Kathy exclaims, “we won! We won!” Eddie tells her, “yeah, but there’s more heats.” Kathy informs Eddie, “Mr. Frazier thinks we just may have broken the State record! We won, Eddie! We won!”

On the way to the bench, Mr. Frazier tells the relay team, “don’t worry. You guys won. That was, by far, your best run ever. And, according to my watch, I think you guys may have broken the State record!” Kathy and Paula wave to the crowd as they walk by. The crowd waves back, and cheers, “Amazon, Amazon, Amazon!”

Once they are back at the bench, Dr. Karakova, who is the Meet Director and Kathy’s father, walks over to congratulate his daughter and the rest of the team. Dr. Karakova tells Mr. Frazier, “that last race looked like one for the record books!” The team cheers, attracting a lot of attention from the other teams. Dr. Karakova then walks over to the Meet Clerk’s desk, reviewing the day’s events.

The Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, also walks up to the Meet Clerk's desk, asking the attendant, "can you tell me who won the shot-put?" One of the Meet Clerk's assistants looks through the summary of that event, and tells Mr. Ruff, "Robert Bradshaw, from Northside." Acting quite arrogant and confident of himself, Mr. Ruff informs the assistant, "you do know that he's a college student, don't you?" The assistant reviews her papers, and replies, "our records indicate that he is a junior, and in his third year of eligibility." Mr. Ruff replies, "thanks, that's exactly what I needed to know."

The Meet Director, Dr. Karakova, asks the assistant, "is there a problem?" Mr. Ruff intercepts the exchange between Dr. Karakova and the assistant, answering brashly, "yeah, I'd say!" Familiar with Mr. Ruff's frequent complaints, Dr. Karakova asks, "so, what would today's problem be?" Mr. Ruff states, "the guy who won the shot-put is a college student. He's not a junior, like your records indicate." Dr. Karakova asks the assistant for the summary sheet for the shot-put. He reviews the rankings, and sees that Robert Bradshaw won the gold medal by a significant margin.

Dr. Karakova inquires of Mr. Ruff, "so, please tell me what makes you suspect that Robert Bradshaw is a college student." Mr. Ruff replies, "his teammates admitted it. They also said that he gets paid to throw the shot-put, and that's how he earns his tuition money for college." Dr. Karakova, not wanting to be bothered by Mr. Ruff's nonsense today, tells him, "that sounds like a very serious infraction of the rules. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I'll definitely look into it." Mr. Ruff replies, "thank you," and briskly walks away. Part of Mr. Ruff's problem is that, if it wasn't for Mr. Frazier and the questionable status of his runners, Centerville would have taken the gold medal in the 4 by 440 relay today.

Once Mr. Ruff is gone, Dr. Karakova tells the assistant, "Robert Bradshaw lives down the street from me. I remember when he was born. It was the year after Kathy was born. Listen to any further complaints from Mr. Ruff regarding Robert, but ignore them." The assistant tells Dr. Karakova, "Centerville doesn't even have a participant in the shot-put. Why would they care?" Dr. Karakova replies, "exactly."

Dr. Karakova asks the Meet Clerk, "do we have any spare special medals in the honorary medal collection?" An honorary medal may be given to a contestant, for example, who broke the State record in any given event, whether it is during the State invitational meet or a regular season meet. Looking through the collection, the Meet Clerk tells Dr. Karakova, "we actually have a few dozen." Dr. Karakova tells the Meet Clerk, "find me the most generic medal you have in the collection, and put my name on it. Make sure it's with the rest of the awards for the ceremony."

The teams have a half hour before the awards ceremony, so they take the time to get a bite to eat. The team has been waiting all day for pizza, so there is no question about what they will get. Mr. Frazier has been converted to a pizza connoisseur, having a few slices himself. The team attempts to convince Mr. Frazier that eating pizza is why they all run so fast. Mr. Frazier doesn't believe that for a second, but he tells them that they might be on to something.

After dinner, they return to the arena where the awards ceremony is about to begin. The Meet Announcer introduces today's officials, and congratulates all of the athletes for making it this far and for their participation. While the announcements are being made, some of the team members are still eating some left over pizza.

The bet between Kathy and Braden made earlier this year has been finally settled. Kathy won more medals, but Braden won more gold medals. Kathy contends she won less gold medals because she had to run against Eddie. But, the bet was on the total number of medals, so Kathy wins the bet. Braden owes Kathy a pizza. Kathy, while she doesn't remember making the bet, will be glad to collect her winnings anyway. Kathy has decided she'll wait to settle the score when she can get a real pizza from the pizzeria.

The announcement is made, introducing the winners of the 40-yard dash. Eddie and Kathy are called to the stage. Eddie stands on the first place tier, and Kathy stands on the second place tier. When Eddie and Kathy are draped with their medals, the entire Northside bench cheers. The Meet Announcer makes a special announcement, telling everyone that Kathy broke the women's State record in the event. Kathy receives a special medal for that significant accomplishment. Eddie and Kathy return to their bench, where the rest of the team congratulates them.

In other individual events, Braden takes the gold medal in the 440-yard dash, and looks to be on track to break the State record next year. Mark and Paula are called up for the 220-yard dash. Mark takes the gold medal, and Paula takes the bronze. Paula got beat out in a photo finish by inches by a senior. This is good news for Paula, who will start off as the State's third seed in this event this Spring.

The ceremony moves on to the relay events. Hoffer, Tessa, Erika, and Lena win the gold medal in the 4 by 220 relay. Braden, Johnson, Erika, and Mitchell take the gold medal in the mile medley relay. Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula take the gold medal in the 4 by 440 relay. The 4 by 440 relay team gets special recognition for breaking the State record, and a special medal to go with it. The crowd begins the Amazon chant again when the 4 by 440 relay team is draped with their medals.

The focus then turns to the field events. Bobby B. is called to the stage to receive the gold medal in the shot-put. Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, is not happy about this award. He is convinced that Robert Bradshaw is a college student, and thought that Dr. Karakova was going to investigate. Mr. Ruff, however, is hopeful that the investigation will begin on Monday morning. Regardless of Mr. Ruff's objections, Bobby B. receives his gold medal in the shot-put.

Once all of the awards have been distributed, Dr. Karakova comes to the podium to make a surprise announcement. Holding a medal in his hand, he addresses the crowd, telling them, "this year, we have one more award to distribute. This is a very special award that has never been given out before. Mr. Frazier, from Northside High School, will you come up to the stage, please." Mr. Frazier walks up to the podium, not having the slightest clue of what to expect.

While Mr. Frazier makes his way to the front, Mr. Ruff, Mr. Parker, and some of the other coaches cannot believe what they are seeing. They cannot even fathom how Mr. Frazier, who appears to break all the rules by paying runners and traveling the world in search of new talent, can possibly receive an award.

Mr. Frazier steps up to the podium. Dr. Karakova announces, "I don't really know who on the Northside team is most deserving of this award, but I believe many of them are responsible. So, I have decided to give the award to their coach, Mr. Frazier." Dr. Karakova drapes the gold medal around Mr. Frazier's neck, announcing, "the gold medal in psychological warfare for this year's indoor track season goes to Mr. Frazier, the head coach of Northside High School." The crowd cheers, many of them wondering why this award was even given.

Dr. Karakova has made his point again, but will likely have to make the same point next year. Mr. Frazier shakes Dr. Karakova's hand, and announces, "thank you. Thank you. I must admit, though, that one of the guys I picked up from Czechoslovakia years ago is largely responsible for the team's success in this area. Everyone please give a hand to Mark Svoboda!" Mark stands up and waves, as the crowd claps. Dr. Karakova tells Mr. Frazier, "I'll be looking forward to seeing what you have planned for us next year!"

Mr. Frazier returns to the team's bench, and finds college scouts, reporters, photographers, and parents all around. The team poses for photographs, displaying their medals proudly around their necks. Mr. Frazier answers questions posed by the press the best he can. One of the reporters from last year asks Mr. Frazier if he made his planned trip to the Amazon last Summer. Mr. Frazier tells him that he did, and it went well. Mr. Frazier figures that controversial rumors and any exposure at all is

better for the team. Mr. Frazier tells one of the reporters that he is now exploring Africa to find new talent.

Dr. Karakova comes over to the Northside bench to congratulate the team. One of the reporters interrupts Dr. Karakova and asks, "how can you let Mr. Frazier get away with all the stuff he does year after year?" Dr. Karakova tells the reporter, "did you entirely miss the award that Mr. Frazier won?" The reporter seems very perplexed at Dr. Karakova's comment. Dr. Karakova ignores anything else the reporter has to say, and focuses his attention on the team.

The celebration begins to wind down and everyone is ready to get home. The busses are waiting, so the athletes head to the locker room to pick up their stuff. The celebration, however, will continue over the next few days. Braden will ensure that everyone back at school knows how well the team did. And, Kathy walks away from today's meet happier than she has ever been during this school year.

When they get back to the school, Mr. Frazier asks the medalists to bring their medals next Friday for the yearbook photograph. He congratulates the medalists again, and tells them that they all have a place on the Spring track team. Kathy and Eddie then head to Kathy's car. Kathy drives away with Eddie, ending a long day, and a very long track season.

Kathy fails to turn left out of the school parking lot but, instead, she turns right. She drives down the road away from her house, prompting Eddie to ask, "where are we going?" Kathy replies, "I'm showing you the new long way home." The new long way home is through the town behind the high school, where there is a small park, with only a few parking places. Very few people even know that the park is there. Eddie and Kathy take the long way home that night, something that Kathy's been waiting quite a while for.

On Monday, following the weekend of the State invitational meet, the team proudly displays their medals around their necks as they walk into the school. The tribe gathers in the lobby before school starts, and anyone walking in has no doubt who the medalists are. Braden, making his accomplishments well known, exclaims, "we kicked ass again this year! Next year, they're not even going to have a State meet. They're just going to give us all the medals!" It seems everyone enjoys listening to Braden brag, particularly because he always delivers.

Mr. Crum then walks through the lobby, and Braden is quickly reminded that he was reprimanded last year for his use of profanity. Braden, remembering Eddie's description of how he belted Chuckie to the fence last year, suddenly changes his tone. Braden continues his rant,

and exclaims, "I placed my foot into the backside of their body, right below their low back with enough force to send them to China! And then, I did it again!" Mr. Crum gives Braden an odd and interesting look, and walks by.

The tribe heads to class, kind of glad that the indoor track season is over. Kathy is especially glad that the season is over. She's been through way too much, and doesn't want to go through it again. After hearing the doctor tell her that eliminating stress is paramount to avoiding autoimmune disorders, she is not about to put up with any more of Mr. Crum's shit shows, now and forever. But, so far, not a peep has been heard from Mr. Crum. And, now that Spring has arrived, cutoffs are back. It's not likely that Mr. Crum will choose to fight the clothing battle again.

Monday morning again starts with English class for the tribe. Eddie, Braden, Johnson, Mark, Bobby B., and Mitchell sit in their usual place near the window, along with Wendy. Miss Starr walks in, who is always very aware of how well the sports teams are doing. Miss Starr tells the class, "this is going to be, by far, my favorite moment of the week." She asks Eddie, Braden, Johnson, Mark, Bobby B., and Mitchell to come to the front of the classroom. This time, Braden knows why he is being called to stand in front of the class. Two years ago, when Miss Starr called them to the front of the classroom, he thought he might have been in some sort of trouble. This year, Braden knows better. Miss Starr tells the group, who are all wearing their medals, to stand and face the class.

Miss Starr announces to the class, "Eddie, Mark, Axel, Eric, Gary, and Robert have all taken first place in the State track meet this weekend in several events. If I am not mistaken, the team even broke a few State records at the meet. The team gave a really good performance this weekend." Miss Starr tells the medalists, "well done, guys." She then instructs the class, "everyone please give them a round of applause." The class applauds and cheers, except for Chuckie and O'Brien. The medalists return to their seats, and are glad to find out that their efforts are appreciated off the track.

It's no surprise to anyone why Miss Starr is one of the school's most-liked teachers. She cares about her student's academic performance, for which many of them are recognized. She also recognizes that many students excel in other areas, and are rarely recognized for their performance and contributions. It gives her great pleasure to bring attention to such accomplishments whenever she can.