

Eddie, The Junior Year

Chapter Five Spring Track Tryouts

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Tryouts for the Spring track team will begin earlier this year than usual. The Spring season usually brings a larger field of students wanting to be part of the team. With the indoor track team bringing home so many medals this year, this year's field of athletes trying out for the Spring track team will be enormous. Many of the students trying out for the team think that track is easy, and they can earn a medal too. If they can run fast enough, perhaps they can earn a medal. But, Mr. Frazier would have known if anyone were fast enough to be a star on the track team, for he would have seen it in their performance during gym class. If such potential talent was suspected in any student, they would have received a special invitation to try out for the track team.

Wednesday, after school, brings the largest field of athletes ever to try out for track and field. The locker room fills up with track stars, upcoming track stars, and wannabe track stars.

Even Chuckie is going to try his hand at track and field again. He is not about to let Eddie show him up anymore. After indoor track tryouts, it is safe to say that Chuckie will be staying clear of the shot-put. It's also safe to say that Chuckie will be steering clear of the high jump. Perhaps he will become the school's new master at the javelin, hammer, or discus.

And then, there's Jimmy O'Brien. Now that O'Brien is a junior, he thinks he might finally have what it takes to make the team. After all, half the people trying out for the team will be freshmen and sophomores, and younger than O'Brien.

Mr. Zunde gives the announcement directing the students to the proper location for whatever sport they are trying out for. Track and field will meet in the auxiliary gym before they head out to the track. Eddie and the tribe take a seat together, amazed at the number of new faces

they see. Barbara walks in, and sits with Johnson. She is helping out with the team again, as an assistant coach, as she did during indoor track.

Mr. Frazier enters the gym, and introduces himself, Mr. Zunde, and Wendy. He looks around for Barbara, who walks up to join them. Mr. Frazier introduces Barbara as the assistant coach, and informs everyone that she will be working with the distance runners today. Anyone who tried out for last year's team knows exactly what that means. The quick and easy cut for distance runners has become a yearly ritual.

Mr. Frazier announces, "okay, everyone listen up. I don't want anyone to leave yet, because the agenda has changed this year. Wait until I am finished speaking, and then you will all head out to the track together." Mr. Frazier instructs the team, "if you are a field athlete, you will assemble in the field area. Bobby B. will take you there. If you are a distance runner, you will follow Barbara to the track. If you are a sprinter, you will follow Johnson, and assemble near the sprinting lanes."

Mr. Frazier, noticing Jimmy O'Brien in the bleachers, states, "and, if your name is Jimmy O'Brien, head to the locker room right now! You are cut from the team immediately!" O'Brien walks to the locker room, wondering why he was denied a chance to try out for the team. But, Mr. Zunde has told Mr. Frazier that, unless an athlete understands the rules, they need not be given a chance to try out for the team.

Once the laughter that followed the dismissal of O'Brien dies down, Mr. Frazier continues, "now, here's what's different. If you are trying out for both a track event and a field event, please remain here for a brief meeting with me and Mr. Zunde." Mr. Frazier dismisses the athletes, who all head out to the track. On the way out, Barbara asks Mr. Frazier, "what's the cutoff this year?" Mr. Frazier replies, "go for a 6:15 again. We'll see what we have left after that."

After last year's outdoor season, Mr. Frazier wanted an idea of who is interested in both a track event and a field event. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde see that Eddie, Kathy, Paula, and a few other runners, want to try out for a field event this year. Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, Kathy, and Paula that they need not try out for the track events, and that they already have a place on the team. They are told that they should try out for the field events today. Mr. Frazier tells the others who are interested in both a track event and a field event that they will try out for the track events today, and the field events tomorrow. After the short meeting, Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, and the athletes then head out to the track.

The rest of the group is already on their way to the track. On the way, Chuckie decides to act a little cool, and gives Erika a bra snap and a wedgie at the same time. Chuckie, perhaps, smoked a little too much pot

before school today. Chuckie's actions clearly do not sit well with Erika, who quickly turns around, and forcefully slams her fist into Chuckie's mid section. Chuckie bends over in pain, and Erika gives him a well-placed uppercut to his left jaw. Chuckie falls to the ground, and Erika proceeds to pulverize him, delivering one punch after another, at will. Showing no signs of relenting, Erika proceeds to kick the shit out of Chuckie.

The crowd steps back, giving Erika and Chuckie room to fight. If Chuckie were winning, Braden, and a few others, would step in and stop the fight immediately. But, since Erika is clearly winning, the fight is allowed to go on.

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk out of the school, and see the fight from a distance. Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "it looks like Erika is kicking the shit out of somebody. What is that guy's name?" Eddie, seeing the fight, tells Mr. Zunde, "that's the little Chuckie. It looks like Erika's really taking care of him." Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "we'd better go and break it up." Mr. Zunde starts walking a little slower as to not get there too quickly. Mr. Zunde remembers Chuckie quite well from the indoor season, and the trouble he caused.

In the mean time, Erika is beating Chuckie to a bloody pulp. Chuckie is face down in the dirt, as Erika twists his right arm behind his back. A loud pop is heard coming from Chuckie's right shoulder, which could be a dislocation or torn rotator cuff. Chuckie lets out a loud scream, and cries himself a river. Erika decides that Chuckie has had enough for now, so she stands up. Before she steps aside, Erika takes her foot and rams it into Chuckie's ass several times, yelling, "you piece of shit," with every drive of her foot. She then kicks Chuckie in the side of his rib cage, likely breaking a rib or two.

Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier arrive, albeit a little late, to break up the fight. Mr. Zunde calmly asks Erika, "what was that all about?" Still fired up, Erika tells Mr. Zunde, "he snapped my bra and gave me a wedgie!" Mr. Zunde replies, "oh, I see." After a pause, Mr. Zunde asks Erika, "and then?" Erika replies, "I kicked the shit out of his fat ass!" Mr. Zunde replies, "good. It looks like you did a good job. I'm sure he won't try that again."

Braden tells Mr. Zunde, "I saw the whole thing! Chuckie snapped her bra, and then he almost knocked her over with the wedgie. She turned around and kicked his ass! There hadn't been an ass kicking like that since I've been going to this school! I was afraid to stop her! I didn't want to get in the middle of that one. That was one supreme first-class ass kicking if I ever saw one!" Mr. Zunde tells Braden, "that, it certainly was." Braden could have easily stopped the fight but, as long as Erika was winning, he just let the fight continue.

Mr. Zunde tells Chuckie, “you, on the ground. Stand up.” Chuckie, who is still crying like a baby, manages to stand up, grasping his right arm. Mr. Zunde asks Chuckie, “what happened?” Mr. Zunde already knows what happened. He just wants to hear Chuckie’s twisted side of the story. Chuckie, still sobbing like a pansy in a hurricane, tells Mr. Zunde, “she just started hitting me.” Mr. Zunde asks, “for no reason at all?” Chuckie replies, “yeah.” Everyone knows that Chuckie is not telling the truth.

Mr. Zunde asks Chuckie, “did you snap her bra and give her a wedgie?” Chuckie, still sobbing like a baby, tells Mr. Zunde, “well, yeah. I was just playing around.” Mr. Zunde informs Chuckie, “at your age, that’s not playing around. It’s called sexual assault.” Mr. Zunde tells Chuckie, “go inside and see the school nurse. Now!” Chuckie limps back to the school, holding his shoulder, and sobbing the entire way.

Erika asks Mr. Zunde, “am I in a lot of trouble?” Mr. Zunde tells Erika, “if your story is accurate, you are in absolutely no trouble at all.” A few of the athletes standing around all tell Mr. Zunde that it happened just as Erika described. After hearing the other students’ testimony, Mr. Zunde tells Erika, “it sounds like everyone saw the same thing. You have nothing to worry about.” Erika tells Mr. Zunde, “I don’t even feel like running right now.” Mr. Zunde tells Erika, “why don’t you come and throw the discus or javelin today. You’ve already made the track team by medaling in the State meet.” Erika replies, “I think I just might do that.”

Mr. Frazier brings everyone together and announces, “well, I didn’t know the school had a professional wrestling team. You learn something new every day.” The athletes laugh, then Mr. Frazier continues, “okay, since today’s entertainment is over, I want all of my distance runners to please follow Barbara.” Seeing the overly large field of distance runners, Mr. Frazier whispers to Barbara, “I changed my mind. Have Mitchell run a six-minute mile.” Anyone who cannot run a six-minute mile will be cut immediately. Anyone below that time still might have a chance to make the team. Barbara will separate the pack at the finish line into those who will go home, and those who will be invited back tomorrow.

Mr. Frazier then announces, “if you’re a field athlete, please follow Mr. Zunde. If you’re a sprinter, follow me to the starting line.” The athletes break out, and head to their designated location.

This year, Eddie, Kathy, and Paula will try their hand at the discus. They follow Mr. Zunde to the field, and are joined by Erika. Eddie asks Kathy, “so, you’re competing against me again?” Kathy tells him, “not really. I’m going to let you win. I know how much this means to you.” Eddie tells her, “you’re so sweet. Thank you so much. I’d hate for someone to make me look bad in front of the Chuckie.” Kathy laughs, and

replies, “he went back inside. So, you’re safe.” Eddie fakes sobbing and whines, “you mean, the little Chuckie is not going to try out? Please tell me it isn’t so. Our team needs the Chuckie.” Kathy replies, “without the Chuckie and O’Brien, the team just isn’t going to be the same. You guys will just have to take up the slack.”

Mr. Zunde tells the shot-put athletes to take a few warm-up throws with Bobby B., and tells them that he will join them shortly. Mr. Zunde decides to first work with the discus. Mr. Zunde tells Wendy, “I hope you’re ready for this. You’ll be busy today.” Wendy, who is driving the Cushman¹, will be retrieving the discus and other field implements for the next two hours. Wendy doesn’t care. She likes driving the Cushman, and will find any excuse to get behind the wheel.

Mr. Zunde shows the group how the discus is thrown as everyone watches. Once he is finished with his demonstration, Mr. Zunde tells the women that they can go first. Erika, who has a lot of steam to blow off, goes first. Erika goes into the wind up and into the spin, and releases the discus, throwing the discus an impressive distance. Mr. Zunde tells her that her throw was very good. Wendy drives out to take the measurement, and enters the distance on Erika’s performance page on her clipboard.

While Wendy is taking the measurement, Mr. Crum, who found out that Chuckie and Erika were in a fight, is having a heated discussion with Mr. Frazier at the finish line. It’s no big secret what the discussion is about. For the time being, Mr. Zunde lets Mr. Frazier and Mr. Crum battle it out. Mr. Zunde will join the comedy show if necessary, but he is too busy at the moment to be bothered with the irate principal.

Wendy retrieves the discus, and brings it back to Mr. Zunde. Kathy’s turn is next. Kathy, who is all excited, gets onto the discus pad, and practices the wind up. Kathy goes into the spin, and releases the discus. Everyone watches, as the discus flies through the air.

Unexpectedly, attention is quickly shifted from the soaring discus to the person crossing into the red zone. That person is none other than Mr. Crum. Mr. Crum, who is not even aware that there is a discus in the air, yells out, “Erika Gabriel, I want to see you immediately!” As Mr. Crum hastily walks through the red zone, the discus strikes his leg, and he falls to the ground.

¹ Cushman: (a corporation) A utility vehicle, larger than a golf cart, used to transport small items.

Mr. Zunde, seeing what happened, yells out, "ground all implements! Ground all implements!" Bobby B., hearing Mr. Zunde's command, also yells out, "ground all implements!" Bobby B. places the shot-put behind the shot-put pad. The javelins and hammer are likewise placed on the ground. The experienced field athletes all know what this means, and they are quick to cooperate. The freshmen get their first lesson on what to do should an undesirable event occur in the red zone. Once Mr. Zunde has determined that all of the implements have been properly grounded, he yells out, "clear!" Mr. Frazier then goes into the red zone to attend to Mr. Crum.

Mr. Frazier tells Mark to run inside and have someone call an ambulance. Mr. Frazier wisely picked the fastest person in the immediate vicinity to perform that task. Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, "lay on your back, and don't move!" Mr. Crum exclaims, "who threw the discus at me! I demand to know! Who threw it?" Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, "calm down, and don't move!" Mr. Crum again yells out, "who threw it at me? Tell me!" Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, "shut up, already! And, don't move!" Mr. Crum, not surprisingly, appears to be more concerned about who was on the other end of the discus rather than his own health and the fact he can't seem to stand up.

Mr. Zunde then arrives at the scene. Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, "he ran into the discus." Mr. Crum exclaims, "I didn't run into the discus! Someone threw it at me! Who was it? I want to know!" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, "that's quite unfortunate." Mr. Crum, still on the ground, is still demanding to know who threw the discus. Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, "just shut up, Crum. The ambulance will be here soon. At least, you're still alive. You should consider yourself fortunate. And, by the way, you shouldn't have been in the red zone. This is your own fault."

Mr. Frazier takes Mr. Zunde aside, telling him, "he came up looking for Erika, and I saw her at the discus pad. I tried to stop him from entering the red zone. He wouldn't listen. He told me, 'I'm the principal of this school. You don't tell me what to do.'" Mr. Zunde replies, "I guess he found out the hard way." Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, "I'd like to say he won't do that again, but this is not the first time he's walked through the red zone." Looking over at Mr. Crum, Mr. Zunde mentions, "oh, wonderful. He's trying to stand up." Mr. Zunde commands Mr. Crum, "Crum, you idiot! Do not move! Lay down!" Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk back over to Mr. Crum to make sure he doesn't injure himself further.

Mr. Crum yells at Mr. Zunde, asking him, "what took so long for anyone to get to me?" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, "we had to ground all the implements." Mr. Crum exclaims, "ground all the implements? What is that supposed to mean? I was hit!" Mr. Zunde calmly explains to Mr. Crum, "we had to make sure all the implements, the shot-put, the discus,

the javelin, and the hammer, were all safely grounded. Otherwise, someone else may end up just like you. No one enters the red zone without the proper training. And you, sir, do not have that training.” Mr. Crum, pointing at Wendy sitting in the Cushman, exclaims, “how about her? She was out there!” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “she’s had the proper training. She knows what she’s doing. You haven’t had the training, and you’ve clearly demonstrated that you don’t know what you’re doing.”

If someone is in the red zone during practice or a meet, they should always be facing in the direction from which the implements are thrown. No official or assistant would ever be caught with their back to the launch points of the implements. When Wendy retrieves the discus, she drives the Cushman outside of the red zone, next to the track, to a point farther than the discus, or other implement, was thrown. She then drives toward the launch points to retrieve the discus, javelin, or hammer. Wendy is working solo today, so she is extra careful. For extra safety, the field athletes are instructed not to throw an implement when they see anyone in the red zone with their back to the launch pad.

Kathy, meanwhile, does not seem to give a rip that Mr. Crum got in the way of the discus. Standing next to Eddie, she tells him, “I can just see this one going down real well. I can hear it tomorrow morning, ‘Katarina Karakova, please report to the principal’s office.’” Eddie tells her, “he was in the red zone. It’s his own fault anyway.” Kathy replies, “yeah, I know. And, I’m choosing not to care.” Eddie reminds Kathy, “and, you heard what the doctor said. You should avoid stress.” Kathy decides, “so, when I have to go to the principal’s office, I’m going to lecture him. He’s not going to lecture me.”

Kathy, blowing off a little steam, tells Eddie, “and, when I’m sitting in his office, looking at his broken desk, he’s going to say to me, ‘Kathy, it has come to my attention that you intentionally threw the discus at me yesterday. I am going to have to suspend you.’ And then, I’m going to tell him, ‘yeah, that’s exactly right! I threw the discus at you. You’ve got to admit it. It was a perfect shot! And then, I was fighting Springer for the other discus, because I wasn’t even close to being done! In fact, Bobby B. was lining up all the field implements on the ground, in a row, so I can throw them all at you, one by one. But then, Mr. Zunde walked into the red zone. I didn’t want to hit Mr. Zunde, so I stopped. Lucky you.’” Eddie laughs, and tells Kathy, “you’re a little fired up.” Kathy replies, “I’m just sick of his shit. If I get called to his office, that’s what I’m telling him.”

The ambulance finally arrives, and drives to the track through the service gate. Mr. Zunde tells the paramedics, “Mr. Crum had an unfortunate meeting with the discus. The discus won. He has a knee or a leg injury. I would treat it like a fracture.” The paramedics take Mr.

Zunde's advice, and place Mr. Crum on a stretcher and stabilize his injured leg. Since Mr. Crum is quite uncooperative, they have to use more restraints than usual to hold him down.

Braden comments, "look at that! They belted his ass to the stretcher!" Mr. Crum, as he is being carried away, assures everyone, "there's going to be trouble tomorrow!" Braden assures Mr. Crum, "it looks like you already got your trouble today!" The ambulance drives away with Mr. Crum, and everyone is glad to see him leave.

Mr. Zunde calls everyone together, and tells them, "Mr. Crum was in the red zone, and unfortunately he got in the way of the discus. This is exactly why it is important to stay out of the red zone. Don't be the next one to be caught in the red zone." Mr. Frazier then tells everyone, "okay, everyone. Let's get back to work!" The field athletes head back to their tryouts with Mr. Zunde. The sprinters return to working with Mr. Frazier. What's left of the distance runners, after Barbara sent three-quarters of them home, go for a six-mile training run.

Mr. Zunde tells Kathy, "Mr. Crum messed up your throw. We couldn't get a good measurement. Give it another try." Kathy takes the discus, and gets on the discus pad. She goes into the spin, and releases the discus. Fortunately, this time Mr. Crum is not in the way to mess up her attempt. Wendy drives out to take the measurement, and retrieves the discus. Mr. Zunde informs Kathy, "that was a very impressive throw. And, your form was great." Kathy replies, "and, no idiot got in the way of my throw this time." Kathy apparently has a lot of adrenaline to burn off.

The rest of the day goes reasonably well. Mr. Frazier, using the 100-yard dash and the 440-yard dash as a gauge, has trimmed the field of sprinters to a manageable level. From Mr. Frazier's vantage point, there are only two races that are run in Spring track, the 100-yard dash and the 440-yard dash. Any distance race more than 440 yards is nothing more than a 440-yard dash with a short, long, or very long warm-up before the final sprint. And, the 220-yard dash is nothing more than a prolonged 100-yard dash.

After practice, everyone heads to the locker room. While they are changing, the big discussion among the athletes is the fight between Erika and Chuckie, and Mr. Crum being taken down by the discus. Everyone is wondering what tomorrow will bring, especially since the two events that occurred will involve Mr. Crum attempting to bring disciplinary action down on someone. No one is expecting Mr. Crum to just forget about what happened out on the track. There will be a clash, but Mr. Zunde will be sure to defend Erika and Kathy. But, for now, everyone is focused on securing their place on the team.

After everyone gets changed, Kathy, Paula, and Erika meet in the front of the school waiting for the guys. Kathy mentions to Erika, "it looks like you really took care of the Chuckie today." Erika replies, "well, it was going to happen sooner or later." Kathy asks, "what was going to happen?" Erika replies, "the fight. I've been ready for him for years. I guess today was Chuckie's lucky day."

Paula asks, "for years? What's been going on?" Erika explains, "Chuckie is a year ahead of me. It started when I was in first grade. He would always give me a wedgie, and pull down my pants in front of everyone. He thought it was funny. I didn't." Kathy exclaims, "he did what?" Erika explains further, "it didn't stop there. Then, in second and third grade, he started beating me up. I was so glad when he went to middle school. It was nice not having him around for a whole year." Paula exclaims, "what a piece of shit!"

Erika explains, "and that is why I look like this today," showing Kathy and Paula her biceps and abs. Erika continues, telling Kathy and Paula, "so, I started working out when I was ten years old, mostly by lifting weights. So, now I work out about two hours a day. I was tired of putting up with all his crap. My dad told me that if someone starts something, I should finish it right there. So, I did. And, I don't care what the principal does. My dad will take care of him."

Kathy remarks, "wow! That Chuckie really is an asshole!" Paula tells Erika, "if they call you to the principal's office, tell the secretary to get Mr. Zunde." Kathy remarks, "Mr. Crum will definitely call her to his office tomorrow. If that little jerk ran out into the red zone to get her, he'll stop at nothing."

The guys arrive, and everyone walks home, except for Kathy and Eddie. Kathy gets to drive home. On the way, Kathy fills Eddie in on Erika's story. After hearing the details, Eddie tells Kathy, "see? We knew there was something up with her last Summer. We knew she was hiding something." Kathy remarks, "well, it ain't hidden now." Erika's secret is now out in the open.

During the drive home, Kathy, pretending to be compassionate, asks Eddie, "don't you feel sorry for the poor little defenseless Chuckie?" Eddie replies, "no." Kathy asks, "not even a little itty bitty bit?" Eddie replies, "no." Kathy asks, "well, don't you feel even a little bad that no one came to help the Chuckie when Erika beat him up?" Eddie replies, "no." Kathy coldly remarks, "me either." They arrive at Kathy's house, and Eddie stays for a while. Eddie then heads home for dinner. They both need a good night's sleep before tryouts tomorrow.

As sure as the sun rises, the next day, during second period, the announcement is made over the loudspeaker, “will Charles Black and Erika Gabriel, please report to the administration office.” In class, Kathy whispers to Paula, “wow! I lucked out.” Paula replies, “this is going to be funny. It’s just too bad that we’re going to miss it.”

Erika heads to the administration office, not knowing what to expect. The rest of the tribe wishes they could be there with Erika. In the gym, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin, “well, it’s time for the comedy hour. I’ll be back later.” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, “I’m coming.” Mr. Chubin remarks, “I’ll hold down the fort.”

Erika, Mr. Frazier, and Mr. Zunde all wait in the administration area. Chuckie arrives last, with his right arm in a sling. Mr. Zunde asks Mrs. Marlowe, the secretary, “do you know what this is all about?” Mr. Zunde already knows what the meeting is about. He just wants to hear what Mr. Crum has told her. Mrs. Marlowe tells Mr. Zunde, “it’s something about a fight yesterday after school.” Mrs. Marlowe whispers to Mr. Zunde, and asks, “did someone beat up Mr. Crum? He’s looking pretty rough.” Mr. Zunde whispers back, “not exactly. He stepped in the way of an airborne discus. The discus apparently won.” Everyone waits around for about ten minutes, and Mr. Crum finally opens his door.

Mr. Crum hobbles out of his office in a cast, walking with the aid of crutches. He goes no farther than his door, for doing so would be too difficult. Mr. Crum brazenly announces, “Erika and Charles, get in here right away!” Mr. Crum tells Erika and Chuckie to have a seat, seating them next to each other across from his desk. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier walk in after the students, and stand with their arms crossed, waiting for the show to begin. Mr. Crum would normally question the reason for Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier’s presence but, today, the reason is clear. Should Mr. Crum challenge Mr. Zunde regarding the reason for his presence, he would lose anyway.

Mr. Crum makes his way to his seat, stumbling along the way. Before he begins, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “I hope you’re feeling a little better today.” Mr. Crum fails to acknowledge Mr. Zunde’s deeply felt compassion.

Mr. Crum opens the meeting by stating, “I don’t know what happened out there yesterday, but I’m going to get to the bottom of it. I’m going to listen to both sides of the story, and then I’m going to make a decision.” Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, “he’s going to make a decision. I can’t wait to hear it.” Mr. Frazier whispers back, “and, we already know what his decision is. He’s going to suspend both of them.”

Mr. Crum announces, "Charles, I am going to start with you. Tell me exactly what happened." Chuckie responds, "we were walking out to the track, and Erika started to beat me up. She wouldn't stop!" Erika exclaims, "he snapped my." Before Erika could finish, Mr. Crum raises his voice, and yells out to Erika, "I'll get to you in a minute! In the mean time, just sit there and keep your mouth shut!" Mr. Crum asks Chuckie, "Charles, why did Erika beat you up?" Chuckie replies, "I don't know." Mr. Crum asks, "is that it? She just beat you up?" Chuckie replies, "yeah. For no reason at all. And, the doctor said my shoulder is dislocated and sprained. And, I also have a broken rib. Now, I can't try out for the discus." Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "good. We all lucked out on that one."

Mr. Crum instructs Erika, "okay, Erika. Tell me what happened." Erika tells Mr. Crum, "we were all walking out to the track. Chuckie snapped my bra, and then he gave me a wedgie. Then I turned around and kicked the shit out of him, like my father told me to do." Mr. Crum asks, "like your father told you to?" Erika replies, "yeah. That's what he told me to do when someone attacks me." Mr. Crum sarcastically tells Erika, "now, now, now, I wouldn't exactly call what Charles did an attack." Erika replies, "I would. And, I really don't care what you think."

Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, "this is going to get good." Mr. Zunde whispers back, "I can see that. I think Erika is just getting warmed up."

Mr. Crum is now hot under the collar. Kathy verbally beat the crap out of him last Autumn, and now Erika is going down the same path. Mr. Crum tells Erika, "I'm not going to put up with your backtalk, young lady." Erika replies, "so don't. Call my father." Mr. Crum replies, "I might just do that." Erika replies with the highly sarcastic, "waiting." Kathy and Paula have taught Erika well.

Mr. Crum has been called on his bluff. So, Mr. Crum, following through with his threat, gets on the intercom and tells Mrs. Marlowe to get Erika's mother or father on the phone. Mr. Crum continues to dig a deeper hole that he will undoubtedly land in later. And, with a broken leg, it's not likely that he will get out of it very easily.

Getting back to his interrogation, Mr. Crum asks Chuckie, "did you snap her bra and give her a wedgie, or whatever you kids call it?" Chuckie replies, "well, yeah. But, I was only joking." Mr. Crum asks Erika, "do you think that someone snapping your bra should result in this type of violence?" Erika replies, "no. It should have resulted in more. I should have kept going until half his bones were broken. My mistake. Next time, I'll do better." Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "she's good."

Mr. Crum tells Chuckie and Erika, “fighting in school is not permitted under any circumstances. So, I’m going to have to suspend both of you.” Erika challenges Mr. Crum, telling him, “it was after school.” Mr. Crum tells Erika, “that doesn’t matter.” Erika asks, “suppose it was the weekend out on the track?” Mr. Crum replies, “I don’t have to answer your questions, young lady. Either way, I’m suspending you.” Erika replies, “so, what you’re telling me is that, the next time I kick the shit out of that shit head, I should drag his fat ass off the school grounds first?” Mr. Crum exclaims, “that’s enough out of you!” Erika, mimicking Mr. Crum in a childlike voice, responds, “that’s enough out of you.”

Mr. Zunde interrupts, and tells Mr. Crum, “and, that’s enough out of you, too. You’re not suspending Erika.” Mr. Crum brashly asks, “and, why not?” Mr. Zunde explains, “when Chuckie snapped Erika’s bra and gave her a wedgie, that is called sexual assault. He specifically targeted two areas of her female anatomy simultaneously, which were her vagina and her breasts. If he had pushed her in her back or hit her on her arm, then that would be a different story. If you suspend her, I’m sure her father will not let this issue go.” Mr. Crum thinks about Mr. Zunde’s comments for a moment, perhaps reconsidering his position.

Chuckie, who knows that he is going to be suspended, brilliantly announces to everyone, “she has no breasts.” Erika yells at Chuckie, asking, “what did you say?” Chuckie replies, “you don’t have any breasts. You’re not even a girl.” Erika gets out of her seat, and proceeds to kick the shit out of Chuckie again, right in front of everyone. Erika pulverizes Chuckie at will, blow after blow. Mr. Crum exclaims to Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, “do something!” Mr. Zunde calmly asks Mr. Crum, “what specifically would you like me to do?” Mr. Crum exclaims, “stop them from fighting!”

Meanwhile, Chuckie is on the floor, being again beaten to a bloody pulp by Erika. This time, Erika pulverizes Chuckie’s face. Mr. Zunde tells Erika and Chuckie, “Erika and Charles, Mr. Crum wants you to stop fighting.” Mr. Crum again exclaims, “do something!” Mr. Zunde slowly walks over to the fight and taps Erika on the shoulder, telling her, “he’s had enough for now. You can finish him off later, after school.” Erika gets in a few more solid blows, and then takes her seat. Chuckie, however, is lying on the floor, altering the color of Mr. Crum’s carpet to a deep shade of red.

Mr. Crum picks up his phone, and calls the school nurse’s office. When she answers, Mr. Crum tells the nurse to come to his office immediately. While they are waiting for the nurse, Chuckie is laying on the ground with a bloody nose and a fat lip, crying like a baby. Mr. Crum puts his elbows on his desk, and holds his head in his hands, trying to

figure out what to do next. The school nurse arrives, and helps Chuckie out of Mr. Crum's office, taking him away to her office.

Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier stand with their arms crossed, awaiting Mr. Crum's next move. Mr. Crum addresses Erika, telling her, "okay, young lady. Please explain to me what you just did." Erika replies, "the first thing I did was hit him in the lip with a right, and then his nose with a left. Then, I started hammering him in his eye, because it's a weak point." Mr. Crum exclaims, "no, no, no! I am asking you why you started another fight!" Erika replies, "I didn't start the first fight." Mr. Crum tells Erika, "I'm going to ask you this one more time. Why did you hit Charles again?" Erika explains, "Chuckie has been doing this crap since first grade. He used to pull my pants down in front of everyone. He thought it was funny, and I didn't. And, my father told me that, if Chuckie ever touches me again, I should beat the shit out of him. And, he said if anyone stops me, he'll haul them off to jail along with Chuckie."

Mr. Crum sits back in his chair, and snickers, asking Erika, "and, just how is your father going to haul someone off to jail?" Erika replies, "he's the police captain. He'll find a way." That was the last thing in the world that Mr. Crum wanted to hear. Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "this is getting good. You can't even begin to make this stuff up." Mr. Crum, knowing that he is in a tight situation, is now very silent.

Mr. Zunde breaks the unexpected intermission, and tells Mr. Crum, "Chuckie started the fight yesterday with two physical sexual assaults. Today, we all heard a verbal sexual assault out of Chuckie. You really might want to reconsider suspending Erika." Mr. Crum tells Mr. Zunde, "rules are rules, Mr. Zunde." Mr. Zunde replies, "oh, I know that. We have rules in track and field too, like staying out of the red zone. The police also enforce rules. Their rules are called laws and the law just happens to trump your little policy manual sitting next to *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* over there on your bookshelf." Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Crum, "by the way, have you ever read it?" Mr. Crum replies, "yes! Of course I've read the policy manual!" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, "I wasn't talking about the policy manual. I was talking about *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*."

Getting back on track, Mr. Crum asks Mr. Zunde, "well, what do you expect me to do?" Mr. Zunde replies, "I'm sure that there are a few overdue library books that need your attention. But, if you want to deal with getting in the middle of assault charges, be my guest. I am not going to stop you."

Mr. Crum realizes that he has just dug himself into a deep hole. Mr. Zunde has just informed Mr. Crum that the school's policy manual is not going to carry any weight if an assault charge is filed. But, Mr. Crum has

already had the secretary call Erika's mother or father at home so that he can speak with one of them. It's not likely he can backpedal his way out of this one.

While they are waiting, Mr. Frazier tells Erika, "by the way, you're on the team!" Erika replies, "awesome! Thanks!" Mr. Frazier mentions, "if you think you can keep up with Braden, I can put you in the 440." Erika replies, "I'll definitely give it my best! That's my favorite event." Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, and Erika talk about track for a while, as Mr. Crum waits to hear back from the school secretary.

Mrs. Marlowe, the school secretary comes to the door and interrupts the conversation. She informs Mr. Crum, "Erika's father is on his way." Mr. Crum replies, "on his way? I just wanted to talk with him!" Mr. Zunde interjects, "well, it looks like now you'll get your chance." Mr. Crum replies, "I didn't mean that he had to come to the school." Mr. Crum, learning that Erika's father is a police captain, is not looking forward to that confrontation. Erika, now much more relaxed knowing that her father is on the way, asks, "why not?" Mr. Crum has no answer, so he ponders what he can do to change the subject and moves on.

Mr. Crum, recalling the events of yesterday, asks Mr. Zunde, "who threw the discus at me yesterday?" Mr. Zunde informs Mr. Crum, "no one threw the discus at you. You got in its way." Mr. Zunde knows Mr. Crum's weak point. Mr. Zunde is making Mr. Crum take the painfully long way to get the answer to his question. Mr. Crum asks the question again, in a different way, "someone threw that discus. Who was it?" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, "it doesn't matter who threw the discus. You were not only in the red zone, but you entered the red zone after you were warned not to. What happened to you after you entered the red zone is your problem. There is a reason why it is called the 'red zone.' You should have been more careful." Mr. Crum brashly tells Mr. Zunde, "I'm going to find out who threw the discus at me." Mr. Zunde asks, "and, then what are you going to do about it?" Mr. Crum replies, "I will have them suspended or expelled." Mr. Zunde firmly tells Mr. Crum, "that, sir, you will not do. You have no argument. What happened to you in the red zone was totally your own fault."

It doesn't take Erika's father long to drive up to the school in a police car. He walks into the administration area and tells the secretary, "find Erika Gabriel for me. I'm her father." The secretary, pointing to Mr. Crum's office, tells Mr. Gabriel, "she's in the principal's office, right over here." Mr. Gabriel opens the door, as if he owns the building, and walks right in. He's apparently not in the mood for conforming to the school's protocol.

Mr. Crum is shocked to see the officer just walk right into his office. Looking at Erika, Mr. Gabriel asks, "what's going on here?" Mr. Crum replies, "Erika was fighting in school today." Mr. Gabriel firmly tells Mr. Crum, "I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to Erika. I'll get to you in a minute." Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "we could charge admission to these meetings."

Mr. Gabriel asks Erika, "does this have anything to do with that Charles Black character again?" Erika tells her father, "yeah. He told me I have no breasts, and that I wasn't even a girl. So, I just kicked the shit out of him again." Mr. Gabriel replies, "good." Listening to Mr. Gabriel talk with Erika, Mr. Crum is getting very distressed. He has fallen into the hole that he dug for himself, and has no conceivable way of getting out.

After Mr. Gabriel is finished talking to his daughter, he introduces himself, telling everyone, "I'm Erika's father. I can't tell you how happy I am to waste my time having to be called down to this school for this nonsense." Mr. Crum announces, "I'm Mr. Crum. I'm the principal of this school." Mr. Gabriel ignores Mr. Crum at the moment, sending a clear message of who is running this meeting.

Mr. Gabriel turns to Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier. Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Gabriel, "good morning. I'm Mr. Zunde, one of Erika's track coaches, and this is Mr. Frazier. Mr. Frazier is the head coach of our track and field team and one of our physical education instructors." Mr. Gabriel shakes their hands and tells Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, "it's nice to meet you. Erika speaks very highly of you both."

Mr. Gabriel turns to Mr. Crum, commanding him, "now, tell me your side of the story." Mr. Crum tells Mr. Gabriel, "I'm going to have to suspend Erika for fighting in school. She started a fight right here in my office today." Mr. Gabriel asks Mr. Crum, "what was the name of that kid who started the fight yesterday?" Mr. Gabriel already knows the answer, but he is asking anyway since he is conducting an investigation. Mr. Crum replies, "Charles Black." Mr. Gabriel tells Mr. Crum, "get him down here right away." Mr. Crum suddenly suspects that he is no longer the supreme authoritative figure in the room. He would be right.

Mr. Crum informs Mr. Gabriel, "he's in the nurses office. He was bleeding very badly." Mr. Crum then asks, "why do you want to see him?" Mr. Gabriel replies, "I want to question him. Unless he's in a coma, get him down here immediately." Mr. Crum tells Mr. Gabriel, "I can't do that right now." Mr. Crum's answer did not sit well with Mr. Gabriel. Mr. Crum thinks he can throw his weight around. Unfortunately, the only weight Mr. Crum has to throw around is the fat around his mid section.

Mr. Gabriel informs Mr. Crum, "I am conducting an investigation. I said, get him down here right now. And, I suggest you do not obstruct my investigation, otherwise I will arrest you." Mr. Crum calls the secretary and tells her to tell the nurse to bring Chuckie back to his office. And, Mr. Crum now knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he is no longer the supreme authoritative figure in the room.

Mr. Gabriel then asks Mr. Crum, "were there any witnesses to yesterday's event?" Mr. Crum replies, "I don't know." Mr. Gabriel asks Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, "are either of you aware of any witnesses?" Mr. Frazier replies, "we walked out to the track after the team was on their way. All of the candidates for this year's team saw the fight. Some of them saw how it started and exactly what happened." Mr. Zunde adds, "Braden saw the play by play."

Mr. Gabriel asks Mr. Crum, "do you know who this Braden guy is?" Mr. Crum, realizing that he has lost all of his authority, replies, "yes, I certainly do." Mr. Gabriel tells Mr. Crum, "get him down here right now." Mr. Crum gets on his phone and tells the secretary to call Axel Braden to the office, and asks her to find out the status of Chuckie, since he has not yet returned. Captain Gabriel is wasting absolutely no time getting to the bottom of what happened yesterday.

The announcement is made over the loudspeaker, "Axel Braden, please report to the principal's office immediately." Sitting in the classroom, Braden exclaims, "shit," and leaves class, wondering what he has done now. Walking down the hall, Braden tries to recall any profanity he may have used over the last few days. On the way, he has trouble recalling any profanity that he has used at all. He does recall, however, that he said, "look at that! They belted his ass to the stretcher," referring to when the paramedics had to restrain Mr. Crum. Braden also recalls saying to Mr. Crum, "it looks like you already got your trouble today." Braden comes to the conclusion that he's getting busted for making those remarks. That would mean no track today, and possibly for the remainder of the week. As he walks down the hall, Braden is prepared for the worst.

Braden arrives at the administration area, and the secretary informs Mr. Crum that Axel Braden is waiting. The secretary tells Braden that Mr. Crum wants to see him, and that he can go right into the principal's office. Braden does not have the luxury of being greeted by Mr. Crum, himself, since he is pretty much stuck behind his desk with a broken leg. Braden walks into Mr. Crum's office, seeing a police officer standing in front of him. Braden immediately comes to the conclusion that this is something a lot bigger than he originally thought. The police are not called when someone uses profanity.

Mr. Crum tells Mr. Gabriel, "this is Axel Braden." Mr. Gabriel tells Braden, "it's nice to meet you. I understand you know my daughter, Erika." Braden replies, "yes, sir. I do." Mr. Gabriel informs Braden, "I also understand you were present during the altercation between Erika and Charles Black yesterday." Braden replies, "yes, sir! I saw the whole thing." Braden now understands that he is not in any sort of trouble.

Mr. Gabriel tells Braden, "tell me what you saw." Braden explains, "Chuckie came up behind Erika and snapped her bra. Then, he gave her the biggest wedgie I've ever seen. He about ripped her underwear off her body. She almost fell forward. Then, Erika turned around and kicked his ass! That was the best ass kicking anyone's ever seen in this school! Everyone was afraid to stop her! I wasn't going to get in the middle of that one. When she was done, Chuckie was laying on the ground crying like a little baby." Mr. Gabriel asks Braden, "who else saw it?" Braden replies, "let me think. I was walking with Mark, Johnson, Mitchell, Hoffer, Amber, and the new guy. We all saw it." Mr. Frazier asks Braden, "Adekunle Akinmola?" Braden replies, "yeah, that guy. And a few others."

The nurse returns Chuckie to Mr. Crum's office. Chuckie takes his seat again, next to Erika. Mr. Gabriel greets Chuckie by saying, "it's nice to see you again, Charles." Chuckie does not respond. Mr. Zunde mentions, "it sounds like you know each other." Mr. Gabriel replies, "we do. Charles, here, is putting more time into expanding his rap sheet than he spends doing school work." Mr. Zunde asks, "so, he has a record?" Mr. Gabriel replies, "three drug busts and four assault charges, soon to be five." Mr. Crum, unaware of Chuckie's criminal record, replies, "we didn't know he has a record." Mr. Gabriel replies, "that doesn't surprise me at all."

Mr. Gabriel asks Mr. Crum, "so, when the fight broke out this morning, is this where Erika and Charles were seated?" Mr. Crum replies, "yes, it was." Mr. Gabriel tells Mr. Crum in a matter of fact tone, "if a fight broke out here this morning, it was totally your own fault. If you bring two adversaries into your office, you should have at least had them separated, not sitting next to each other. And, if you were wise, you would have someone who could prevent a fight stationed between them. And, it appears to me that you are in absolutely no condition to break up a fight." Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, "he definitely has a point."

Mr. Gabriel tells Chuckie, "okay, Charles, tell me what happened. You can start with yesterday." Chuckie pouts, and replies, "I'm not telling you anything." Mr. Gabriel replies, "that's fine, Charles. You can expect a visit from Juvenile this evening. They'll take you to your home away from home."

Mr. Gabriel informs Mr. Crum, “it looks like Charles won’t be in school tomorrow, since he’ll be detained. I’m pressing assault charges.” Chuckie starts crying again, saying, “I don’t want to go to that jail again! Please, please don’t send me there!” Mr. Gabriel tells Chuckie, “I’m not sending you there, Charles. You’re sending yourself there. Deal with it. And grow up, Charles. Stop acting like a baby.”

Mr. Crum, who is getting very nervous, asks Mr. Gabriel, “so, Charles is going to jail?” Mr. Gabriel explains to Mr. Crum, “he’ll be spending the night there. And, yes. It’s likely that Charles will go to jail again.” Mr. Crum replies, “now, I don’t think we have to go to that extreme.” Mr. Gabriel, reading the riot act to Mr. Crum, tells him, “I didn’t ask you what you think. What’s your solution? Detention? Suspension? Not allowing students to defend themselves? This is not a case of chewing gum or talking in class. We’re talking about assault here, specifically a form of sexual assault. And, if you are foolish enough to suspend Erika, I’ll drag you into court too. And, let me give you some advice. If you and your school cannot protect Erika, then she will protect herself. And, she has my continued permission to do so. I strongly suggest that you do not get in her way.” Mr. Crum instantly has a flashback, recalling similar words used by Eddie’s father last year.

Mr. Zunde, Mr. Frazier, and Braden stand together watching as Mr. Crum bends over and receives his ass kicking from Mr. Gabriel. Chuckie is sobbing like a baby because he will be carted off to jail later today. Erika finally feels vindicated, after years of putting up with the shit Chuckie dealt to her year after year. Mr. Zunde, for once, did not have to be the one to set Mr. Crum straight. And, Mr. Frazier is glad to see Mr. Crum put back in his place again, at least for a while.

Again usurping Mr. Crum’s authority, Mr. Gabriel tells Erika and Braden, “Axel and Erika, you two can go back to class now.” Erika’s father gives her a hug. Erika leaves, along with Braden, going back to their classes.

Mr. Gabriel tells Mr. Crum, “if you ever call me to this school again regarding Erika defending herself, you’d better be prepared. I don’t have time for your nonsense. And, unless you have anything else to say, I have work to do.” Mr. Crum replies, “no, we’re done here.”

Mr. Gabriel leaves, followed by Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier. Mr. Crum is left in his office with Chuckie. Chuckie, with a fat lip, a likely broken nose, and a dislocated shoulder, wonders how he even got into this situation. Mr. Crum and Chuckie will undoubtedly have an intelligent conversation about Chuckie’s grim future.

On the way out, Mr. Gabriel tells Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, “I don’t quite understand schools. They make up their own rules regarding insignificant nonsense, like chewing gum in class, which they are free to do. They totally overlook serious offenses. When they see something serious, such as assault, they try to trivialize it, and put it on the same level as being late to class.” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Gabriel, “that happens a lot around here. I usually have to put a stop to it. I truly appreciate you straightening out Mr. Crum today.”

Mr. Frazier mentions, “Erika is one of the best athletes on the track team.” Mr. Gabriel replies, “she was so happy when she earned two medals this Winter. She really liked helping out last year, and likes being part of the team even more.” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Gabriel, “Mr. Frazier and I look after the athletes. I can assure you that Mr. Crum will not be a problem.” Mr. Gabriel replies, “good. And, I got to see his desk first hand. Erika told me what happened. Word gets around this town pretty quickly.” Mr. Zunde starts laughing, and says, “Mr. Bogenskaya should have gotten a gold medal for that one.”

Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier head back to the gym. Mr. Gabriel gets back in his police car, which has been sitting parked in front of the school entrance for the last hour. A police car parked in front of the school for almost an hour is certain to stir up the rumor mill. But, since lunch will begin soon, any rumors will be quickly cleared up by Erika.

After lunch, the tribe sits on the lawn and relaxes. Erika fills them in on every last detail of what happened during the morning. Braden, in particular, is glad to see that Erika did not get suspended. Eddie asks Erika what happened with Chuckie after her father left. Erika tells everyone that, the last she knew, Chuckie was still in Mr. Crum’s office. Everyone is wondering whether Chuckie is going to get suspended in addition to going to jail.

While they are all sitting on the grass, Chuckie’s mother, Kathryn Black, walks toward the school entrance. Chuckie’s mother, seeing Eddie sitting on the lawn with the rest of the tribe, yells out, “Edward Bogenskaya, what have you done to Charles this time? I know you have something to do with this! You’re not getting away with this one!” Kathy yells back to Mrs. Black, “he says he’s sorry!” Mrs. Black yells back, “I’ll bet he is!” Everyone laughs at Kathy’s comment, as Mrs. Black walks into the school.

Hoping to get an answer, Paula curiously asks Erika, “so, what happened with the Chuckie back when you were in first grade?” Erika explains, “wow! Back then, when I was in first grade, Chuckie was in second grade. We were out on the playground during lunch, and it was a really hot day, so I had shorts on. Chuckie came up from behind me, and

pulled my pants down in front of all my friends. Then, Chuckie and his friends all started laughing at me.” Paula exclaims, “what a shit!”

Erika continues, “that wasn’t the end of it. As we were walking inside, Chuckie snuck up from behind, and pulled my friend Kate’s pants down. He disappeared into the crowd really fast, so we never actually saw it. But, we know it was him.” Paula interjects, “yeah. I don’t see how it could have been anyone else.”

Continuing her story, Erika explains, “then, when I was in second grade, Chuckie started teasing me, telling everyone that I was fat. So, I told him that he was a big fat bully.” Kathy interjects, “that’s the truth.” Erika continues, “so, when I was on my way home from school that day, Chuckie beat me up, and then he tore all the pages out of my notebook, which blew all over the road. I was so mad. I lost all my school work. And, he beat me up one other time that year, and another time when I was in third grade.”

Paula asks, “so, when did you start working out?” Erika explains, “that’s another story. One day, when I was in fourth grade, school let out for the day, and Chuckie tripped me in the hallway and pushed me down. So, I got up, and punched him as hard as I could. Chuckie tried to punch me back, but some fifth grader pinned Chuckie against the wall, and punched him really hard in his stomach. Chuckie doubled over in pain, went down, and started crying. The guy, whoever he was, disappeared really fast. I never did find out who the guy was who came to my rescue. But, I thought to myself that, if I could beat up Chuckie, he would leave me alone. So, during the Summer between fourth and fifth grade, I started lifting weights and running. My dad showed me how to lift weights. I figured that, if I was stronger, I could beat him up. And, if I was faster, I could always run away.”

Mark interrupts, telling everyone, “I have a confession to make.” Paula asks Mark, “oh, really? And, just what would that be?” Mark explains, “that was me who punched Chuckie in the hallway that day. I remember doing that. But, the Chuckie was in a different class, so I had no idea who he was. We never ran into the Chuckie until sixth grade when we all went to middle school.” Erika gives Mark a high-five, telling him, “thanks!” Mark continues, “I thought to myself that guy was a real shithead for tripping a girl like that.” Mark, who started school a year late, was the strongest guy in the school in fifth grade. At that time, he was also the fastest.

Finally getting some relief from the bullying, Erika explains, “I was so glad when Chuckie went to middle school. I had an entire year of peace. But, I continued working out, knowing that I’d run into him again next year. So, when I got to middle school, Chuckie looked a lot bigger, but it

was mostly all fat. And, I was a lot stronger than I was when I was in fifth grade. Then, one day, Chuckie tried to start something with me, and I ran away. He started chasing me, and he couldn't catch me. Right then, I felt a lot safer since I could outrun him. Then, in seventh grade, I was sure that I could beat him in a fight. But, in middle school, he bullied other people." Eddie comments, "yeah. Me, Mark, and occasionally Braden."

Erika asks Eddie, "how did you guys take care of him?" Eddie replies, "we didn't want to get in trouble for fighting in school, so we just took the Chuckie out in gym class." Braden replies, "I remember that! We kicked his sorry ass every chance we got!" Paula exclaims, "you guys didn't!" Mark replies, "oh, yeah. We did!" Eddie adds, "yeah, seriously. About two or three dozen times. Then, the Chuckie's mother came down to the school, and tried to get the Chuckie put in another gym class. But, the school couldn't do it."

Finishing her story, Erika explains, "after a while, Chuckie stopped bothering me. But, I kept lifting weights, running, and working out. I figured someday he'd try to start something with me again, and I was ready for him. I guess that day was yesterday." Interrupting her story, Erika tells everyone, "uh oh. Here comes trouble!"

Seeing Mrs. Black walk out of the school with Chuckie, Eddie exclaims, "wow! Look at the little Chuckie! Erika! What did you do to him?" Braden, taking a look, tells Erika, "wow! That must have been some ass kicking you gave him! Somebody ought to take his ass to the hospital." Mark replies, "that looks more like a face kicking." Erika corrects Mark, telling him, "no, that end is his ass. He's the only Human who eats and shits out of the same hole." After Erika got finished with him, Chuckie looks like he got trampled by a few off-road vehicles out in the woods.

Mrs. Black, overhearing the tribe's conversation, walks over with Chuckie and asks, "so, which one of you guys are responsible for this?" Erika proudly stands up and tells Chuckie's mother, "I am." Erika takes a bow, and sits back down. Paula mentions, "it's time for a curtain call." Mrs. Black asks Charles, "is that the one that did this to you?" Chuckie reluctantly replies, "yeah." Chuckie, who is quite embarrassed, asks his mother, "can't we just go home?" Chuckie's mother tells him, "no. I want to hear what she has to say for herself."

Mrs. Black turns to Erika, and exclaims, "so, what do you have to say for yourself?" Erika tells Mrs. Black, "your son's a pussy. He was an easy take down." Mrs. Black stands there, beside herself, not knowing how to even respond. Mrs. Black shamelessly asks, "and, just what is that supposed to mean?" Erika tells Bobby B., who is the strongest guy in the school, to stand up. Erika tells Chuckie's mother, "this guy is not an easy take down. Got it?"

Chuckie's mother has an axe to grind. But, to the tribe, and especially Eddie, she is providing free entertainment. Chuckie is sure to pay dearly for the embarrassment his mother just put him through, just as he has many times in the past. And, this is what will make Chuckie even more antagonistic in the future. Chuckie's mother grabs him by the hand, telling him, "come on, sweetie. Let's go home."

At the end of the day, the second day of tryouts begins. Barbara helps Wendy move the equipment to the track, as the athletes get ready for another session of pushing themselves to the limit. Bobby B. has Erika convinced that no one is better qualified than her to move the shot-put, so Bobby B. and Erika move the shot-put out to the field together. After yesterday's fiasco with Chuckie, Erika is glad to ride out to the track on Bobby B's. lap. Everyone meets out on the track today and, unlike yesterday, everyone arrives safely.

Paula and Erika decide that they prefer running, and really don't want to throw the discus. Kathy, however, makes it known that she is still interested in the discus. On the way to the track, the three women inform Mr. Frazier of their interests. Mr. Frazier tells Paula and Erika that if they prefer running, that is just fine. Mr. Frazier also informs Kathy that, if she wants to throw the discus, she is welcomed to do that in addition to running.

The first thing on the agenda is to have the milers run a race for time. Yesterday was a cut session. Today is a performance session. Gary Mitchell, Jeff Davis, Amber Amy, and Adekunle Akinmola were the top seeds from yesterday, so they will get the inside starting positions. Barbara gets them ready to run before Mr. Frazier gets the sprinters organized. Barbara tells the field of runners that this is a race for time, and to forget any strategy. She tells them to run their fastest today, and that earning a position on the team is dependent on their time.

Barbara starts the race, and Mitchell takes an early lead. Mitchell usually does not like to be in the lead. He prefers being in second place during the first three-quarters of a mile. Akinmola is right behind Mitchell. Amber, who has been running with Mitchell for years, settles in at third place for the first two laps. The rest of the field is bunched up behind Davis, who is in fourth place.

Mr. Frazier tells Eddie and Mark to organize the 100-yard dash because he wants to watch the mile. Eddie tells the sprinters to form groups of four, and to line up behind the blocks. Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula will be in the first heat. Braden, Johnson, Erika, and Hoffer will be in the second heat. Eddie has everyone lined up, and ready to go when Mr. Frazier is ready.

Meanwhile, the mile is nearly finished. Mitchell is still in the lead, but Akinmola is pushing him hard. Mr. Frazier jogs over to Barbara, who is recording the lead runner's split times. Barbara mentions to Mr. Frazier, "the new guy is pretty good!" Mr. Frazier replies, "I can see that. He's really pushing Mitchell hard." Barbara asks, "what year is he in?" Mr. Frazier replies, "he's only a sophomore." Barbara exclaims, "it looks like you have another winner, and for three years!"

The race comes to a close, and Mitchell crosses the finish line first. Akinmola is not very far behind. Davis comes in third place, with Amber right behind him. Mr. Frazier takes a look at the times, and is excited to see that he has two milers that are at the State level performance, and two more that are very strong contenders. Barbara tells the milers to take a loop around the cross country trail, reminding them that they are on the clock. Mr. Frazier and Barbara then jog back to the sprinters, seeing everyone ready to run.

Mr. Frazier and Barbara get into position at the finish line, ready to time the runners. At the starting line, Braden will be the Starter. Braden announces, "on your marks." He then announces, "set." Braden fires the gun, and the first heat is off. Kathy lets out her primal scream, startling some of the freshmen. This is a well-matched heat. At 25 yards, Eddie is in the lead, with Kathy right behind him. Mark is barely a half step behind Kathy. Paula is right there, just behind Mark. At 50 yards, Eddie is in the lead, and Kathy is still right behind him. Mark and Paula are tied, not far behind the leaders. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first. Kathy finishes in second place, not too far behind Eddie. Mark and Paula tie for third place. Mr. Frazier exclaims, "the winning time was a 9.6! Can you believe it? A 9.6! This is what I expect!"

Braden hands the gun to one of the runners in the heat lined up behind him. That runner will be the Starter for Braden's heat. Braden, and the rest of his heat get ready to run. Braden looks toward the school, and exclaims, "uh oh. Here comes some big trouble! Let's get moving and get this over with. Something's going down, and I want to be there when it happens!" Braden wants a front row seat to what is going to be coming down. The Starter begins the race, which Braden is clearly leading. But, walking from the school to the track, on crutches, is none other than Mr. Crum.

Mr. Crum takes quite a while, with his mangled leg, to get to the track. Mr. Frazier ignores Mr. Crum, paying him not one bit of attention. Kathy, standing with Eddie near the finish line, knows exactly why Mr. Crum is coming out to the track. Mr. Crum makes a bee line to the discus pad. It just as easily could be said that Mr. Crum made a turtle line to the discus pad since he is not moving very fast. At the discus pad, Springer is making a throw. Mr. Zunde is at the shot-put pad, working closely with

the shot-put athletes today. Although he is aware that Mr. Crum is approaching, Mr. Zunde pays him absolutely no attention.

Finally arriving at the discus pad, Mr. Crum asks Springer, “who threw the discus at me yesterday?” Springer replies, “I don’t know.” Mr. Crum exclaims, “how can you possibly not know? You were right here!” Springer replies, “I wasn’t paying attention. I was up last, so I was talking to Bobby B. for a few minutes.” Mr. Crum, not accepting Springer’s answer at face value, asks again, commanding Springer, “let me make this clear. I want you to tell me who threw the discus at me yesterday!” Springer replies, “and, let me make this clear! I don’t know any more about who threw the discus at you yesterday than I know who is on the shot-put pad at this moment. I don’t know who is running in the sprints right now. I don’t know who’s next up throwing the javelin. And, I don’t even know who is throwing the discus after I make this throw. I’m too focused on what I’m doing to pay any attention to anyone else. And, that probably holds true for everyone else out here.” Springer just gave Mr. Crum an education on how intensely athletes focus on their event.

Mr. Crum tells Springer, “well, someone must know.” Springer informs Mr. Crum, “out of all the athletes out here, you might find two or three people who may know who made that throw. When Mr. Zunde told us to ‘ground all implements,’ we took that to mean it’s break time.” All of a sudden, Mr. Crum realizes that he is not the center of the universe. He walks away and sits on the bench near the field area, wondering what to do next.

Mr. Crum has figured it out. He walks over and tells Mr. Zunde that he wants to speak to all the field athletes immediately. Mr. Zunde questions Mr. Crum’s motive. Mr. Crum explains to Mr. Zunde that it must have been one of the field athletes that threw the discus at him. Mr. Crum can clearly see that all of the field athletes are near the discus pad. He can also see that all of the track athletes are running around the track, or running sprints. They are not even in the vicinity of the discus pad. So, Mr. Crum’s logic dictates that it was a field athlete that threw the discus at him. Mr. Crum could have just as easily ruled out the baseball players, since they are on the other side of the schoolyard.

Mr. Zunde tells all the field athletes to gather in a group. Mr. Zunde tells the group, “Mr. Crum wants to talk to you. I will give him five, maybe ten minutes.” The time that Mr. Zunde allots to Mr. Crum will depend on how entertaining the conversation becomes.

Mr. Crum tells the field athletes, “one of you threw the discus at me yesterday. I want to know who it was.” Everyone is silent. Mr. Crum exclaims, “someone must know! I want to know who it was!” Bobby B. asks, “so, you think someone threw the discus at you?” Mr. Crum replies,

“yes! Someone sitting right here threw the discus at me!” Bobby B. asks Mr. Crum, “where were you standing?” Pointing to the field, Mr. Crum exclaims, “over there, in the field, to the right of where Mr. Frazier is standing!”

Throwing out a challenge, Bobby B. then tells Mr. Zunde, “Springer has the best aim of anyone here. And, he’s been throwing the discus longer than everyone else. I’ll give him a hundred dollars if he can hit me. If I have to move even an inch, I’ll consider it a hit.” Mr. Zunde tells the group, “did you hear that, everyone? A hundred dollars if Springer can hit Bobby B.” Bobby B. is smart. If Springer throws the discus anywhere near Bobby B., he will be sure to get out of its way. Bobby B. tells Mr. Crum, “I’m going to go stand where you were. Tell me when I get there.”

Bobby B. walks about 130 feet out into the field. Mr. Crum yells to Bobby B., “move to the right.” Bobby B. moves to the right a few feet. Mr. Crum yells to Bobby B., “there! Right about there!”

Mr. Zunde tells Springer, “go ahead. Try to hit him with the discus.” Springer exclaims, “really?” Mr. Zunde tells Springer, “you heard him. Bobby B. said he’ll give you a hundred dollars if you can hit him with the discus. You have the best aim of anyone here. Try to hit him with the discus. He’ll move out of the way if he’s about to get hit, unlike someone else around here.” Springer has been throwing the discus for a while, and his throws are usually dead-center in the landing sector.

Springer takes the discus, and looks at Bobby B. out in the field. Springer carefully calculates his throw, knowing he has to go slightly left, and not as quite far as he would usually throw. He goes into the spin, and releases the discus. The discus soars toward Bobby B., and lands on the ground twenty feet from where he is standing. Bobby B. grins, and yells to Springer, “try again! You missed!” Springer takes another discus, and makes a second try. Springer again misses, but this time by only fifteen feet.

Bobby B. retrieves the discuses, and walks back to the discus pad. Mr. Crum boldly asks, “and, what was the point of this exercise?” Bobby B. replies, “no one here can throw the discus and hit a target over 100 feet away, especially a moving target. The discus is not thrown for accuracy. It’s thrown for distance, and only distance.” Mr. Zunde is impressed with Bobby B.’s dissertation, so he lets him continue. Everyone is learning a valuable lesson at the moment.

Bobby B. hands Springer a discus, telling him, “here, throw the discus again.” Bobby B. tells Mr. Crum, “watch him carefully as he throws.” Springer is on the discus pad, facing away from the field, getting ready to throw the discus. Bobby B. tells Mr. Crum, “notice that Springer is not

even facing the field. If someone was out on the field right now, he wouldn't even know it." Springer goes into the spin, and releases the discus. After the release, Springer follows through with his momentum.

Bobby B. explains to Mr. Crum, "at no point during the discus throw was Springer looking at the field. But, he knows exactly where the landing zone is at all times. He knows this by experience, not because he sees it. And, his body was spinning the entire time. Even if he could look at the field, anything out there would be a big blur to him anyway. Throwing a discus is not like throwing a baseball or football. You're not trying to hit a target."

Mr. Zunde tells Bobby B., "thank you, Bobby B. I couldn't have explained it better myself." The field athletes all clap in response to Bobby B's. presentation. Mr. Zunde then focuses his attention on Mr. Crum. He tells him, "Mr. Crum, no one intentionally tried to hit you with the discus. You got in its way. And, it was your own fault. You're just lucky it wasn't the javelin. Now, we have work to do here. If you have any more issues to discuss, please do it on your own time, during school hours."

Although he does not like it, Mr. Crum understands Bobby B's. illustration. Mr. Crum tells Mr. Zunde, "okay, that will be enough for now. I'm going to think about this. Everyone can go back to practicing." Mr. Zunde tells Wendy to give Mr. Crum a ride back to the school. Mr. Crum thought this was a nice gesture on the part of Mr. Zunde. The reality of the situation is that Mr. Zunde wanted to get rid of Mr. Crum as fast as possible, having Wendy dispose of him.

After Mr. Crum is gone, the field athletes get back to work. Wendy has disposed of Mr. Crum and, on her way back, retrieves a few implements laying on the field. When Wendy returns, she tells Mr. Zunde, "Mr. Crum was still stuck on who threw the discus at him. He asked me, 'do you know which one of the guys threw it at me?' So I asked him, 'how do you know it wasn't one of the girls, or me?' And, so he said, 'a girl couldn't throw the discus twenty feet. Even I know that.'" Mr. Zunde tells Wendy, "good. Kathy's in the clear then, at least for now." Mr. Zunde now has one less problem to deal with during the next few days.

Back on the track, Mr. Frazier has identified a freshman, John Elliot, who is a reasonably good distance man and a good sprinter. With a little work, he will undoubtedly prove to be a key member of the team in the upcoming years. Between John Elliot, Amber Amy, and Adekunle Akinmola, considerable talent has been added to the team this Spring. Any one of them already has the potential to make it to the State invitational meet.

While the 440-yard dash time trials are underway, Eddie and the tribe take some time out to explain to Akinmola one of the team's controversies. They plan to explain how other teams believe Mr. Frazier traveled to the Amazon to bring women back to run track. They also plan on explaining to Akinmola, at some time, that Mr. Ruff thinks that Mr. Frazier traveled to Africa to find him, but they'll save that for another time.

Eddie, Mark, Kathy, Paula, Johnson, and Hoffer formally introduce themselves to Akinmola. The rest of the tribe is running or busy doing something else at the moment. Eddie tells Akinmola, "hey, we got to fill you in on something." Akinmola replies, "who's filling me in on what?" Eddie replies, "me, Eddie." Trying to get straight who is who, Akinmola replies, "so, you're Eddie?" Eddie replies, "yeah. That's me." Akinmola asks Eddie, "what do I need to know that's so important?" Kathy and Paula explain the Amazon women controversy to Akinmola in great detail. Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Hoffer all help with filling in the details.

Akinmola asks many, many questions. In fact, Akinmola often answers a question with another question. This seems to be part of his personality. Track is very important to Akinmola and his family. Akinmola tells the group that his parents moved from Nigeria, and picked this school district because of the reputation of the track team and the coach. Today, Akinmola has found the group largely responsible for that reputation. He is very happy that the group is very accepting of him.

Johnson informs Akinmola that Mitchell is the best miler in the State. Akinmola was completely unaware of that fact. Johnson tells Akinmola that, with his performance in the mile yesterday, he has a really good chance to make it to the State invitational meet. Akinmola is glad to hear all of this. Being new to the country, he did not know how he would measure up to the competition. Akinmola tells his newly found friends that he will play along with the Amazon women controversy.

Today's tryout session runs longer than usual. Mr. Crum has interfered on both days, causing several interruptions. On the way back to the lockers, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Zunde, "what did Mr. Crum want earlier?" Mr. Zunde yells out to Kathy, "Kathy, come over here for a minute!" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "she's got to hear this too. This is good." Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "I don't think Mr. Crum will be interfering with practice any time soon."

When Kathy arrives, she asks, "am I busted?" Mr. Zunde replies, "no. I think that's been put to rest, at least for a while." Mr. Zunde explains that Mr. Crum attempted to interrogate the field athletes, trying to find out which one of the guys threw the discus at him. Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier and Kathy, "Bobby B. stood out in the field where Mr. Crum was standing,

and that he would give Springer a hundred dollars if he could hit him with the discus. Springer couldn't hit him." Mr. Frazier replies, "well, maybe that issue has been buried."

Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier and Kathy, "but, wait. Here's the good part. Wendy asked Mr. Crum, 'how do you know it wasn't one of the girls?' that threw the discus. Mr. Crum replied, 'a girl couldn't throw the discus twenty feet.'" Kathy starts laughing, and says, "oh really? I guess it couldn't have been me, then!" Mr. Frazier adds, "it takes a big guy, like Chuckie, to throw a discus." Kathy exclaims, "yeah! Us girls are delicate and fragile like little flowers!" Mr. Zunde comments, "yeah, especially Erika."

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde will have a tough time ahead assigning events this year. Eddie and Kathy are both interested in the discus. Akinmola and Elliot are strong new additions to the team. Amber excels at both the half mile and the mile. And the core members of the team are the best in the State at their events. All things considered, this is a good problem for Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde to have.

The next day, the final team roster is posted. The roster attracts a lot of attention this year, primarily because it does not resemble any other roster posted in previous years. Eddie and Kathy, who arrive to school early, are among the first to take a look. As expected, Eddie and Kathy are running together in the 100-yard dash and in the 4 by 440 relay. Eddie notices that he will also be throwing the discus. Kathy, however, suddenly gets very upset because, although she turned in a relatively good performance in the discus, her name is not listed under that event.

Kathy mentions to Eddie, "I wonder how I didn't make the discus. I thought I was pretty good. I threw better than some of the guys who made it." Eddie tells Kathy, "well, we can always ask Mr. Frazier and find out." Kathy replies, "I wonder if I should. Because, you know, they have good reasons for doing what they do." Eddie replies, "yeah. And, if anyone would know, it would be you. You were the team assistant for two years." Kathy, who is very sad, tells Eddie, "this is my senior year. I really wanted this. Not because I'm really good at it, but because I just think it would be so much fun." Kathy is very sad that her name was not listed under the discus. But, if that's the coach's decision, Kathy will accept it.

Eddie and Kathy look over the roster, checking out who is assigned to which event. Eddie asks, "what's this 'U' next to some of the names?" Kathy tells Eddie, "I don't know. 'U' usually stands for 'unsatisfactory'." Eddie mentions, "Erika has the 440-yard dash, and a 'U' next to her name." Kathy exclaims, "oh, here it is on the bottom! 'U' stands for 'utility.'" Eddie remarks, "I wonder what that means." Kathy tells Eddie, "hey, I'm going to go and ask Mr. Frazier what 'utility' means, and maybe

he'll mention to me why I didn't make the discus." Eddie replies, "yeah. Let's go do that now."

Kathy and Eddie walk over to the physical education office, and see that Mr. Frazier is hard at work. He is still working on assigning events for the first meet. Kathy knocks on the door. Mr. Frazier turns around, and tells Kathy, "I was hoping to see you sometime before this afternoon." Kathy asks, "about what?" Mr. Frazier replies, "the discus. I couldn't put your name on the roster under the discus because Mr. Crum will see it. If he saw your name listed under the event, he might reopen his investigation into who threw the discus when he ran into it. I have assigned you to that event, but we don't want to reignite that issue if we can help it. Remember, girls can't even throw the discus twenty feet." Kathy is now instantly happy, and has trouble hiding it. She will get to throw the discus, even though it is not her best event.

Kathy then asks Mr. Frazier, "we were wondering what 'utility' means next to someone's name." Mr. Frazier explains, "a utility runner is someone whose events may change from meet to meet. We all have two goals. We have to win all of our meets, and I have to get as many of you as I can to State. If I switch a few things around, depending on what we're up against, we all stand a better chance of making our goals." Eddie remarks, "that makes a lot of sense." Kathy agrees, mentioning, "yeah, I can see that." This is part of the reason that Mr. Frazier is such a good coach. He informs the team of his reasoning behind his decisions. And, his decisions are not carved in stone.

Mr. Frazier also explains to Kathy and Eddie, "this does not mean that each of you will be throwing the discus in every meet. Mr. Zunde will put up whomever he needs to take first, second, and third place. If we're up against a weak discus team, he'll put up some of the newer guys. You can be sure that, when we're up against Mark Miller, Eddie will be throwing the discus." Eddie asks, "who's Mark Miller?" Mr. Frazier replies, "he throws for Jefferson. He took the silver medal at State last year. He expects to win the gold this year now that Sheffield is gone." Kathy quickly figures out the monumental task facing Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde. Mr. Frazier mentions, "the first meet is in about a week, on Thursday. We'll have it all figured out, and be ready by then." Kathy and Eddie head to class, with Kathy being much happier now than earlier today.

Eddie walks into class, and takes a look to see if Chuckie made it to school, or whether he is sitting in a jail cell somewhere. Seeing no sign of Chuckie, Eddie exclaims, "hey! Where's the little Chuckie today?" Braden replies, "the walk out to the track the other day must have been too much for him to handle." Johnson replies to Braden, saying, "yeah, I'd say. He looked like he was really out of shape. He couldn't even make it out to the track." One of the students, who must be one of Chuckie's friends,

replies, “he’s in jail.” Knowing exactly what happened, Eddie replies, “jail? Wow! The poor little Chuckie must have done something really bad this time! I wonder what it was.”

Eddie takes his seat, and Braden remarks, “Erika’s father must have hauled Chuckie’s ass off to the slammer.” Mitchell tells Eddie, “Chuckie’s moving up in the world. He’s moved into a gated neighborhood with security guards.” The tribe laughs over Mitchell’s remark. Everyone knows exactly what happened to Chuckie. They’ve all had enough of Chuckie’s crap, and are glad that Chuckie is absent today. It certainly appears as if Erika’s father, Mr. Gabriel, has delivered on his intentions to prosecute Chuckie.

The third day of tryouts brings an afternoon of relay drills. Relay drills are not anyone’s favorite activity. The drills, however, are an important activity to the coaches, so they can accurately sort through the talent to form the relay teams. Strong relay teams are a definite plus during a meet. No points are awarded for second place when there are only two teams in the race. Anyone coming in second place in a two-team race gets the infamous title of being the only loser. And, as everyone already knows, losing is not Mr. Frazier’s favorite activity.

The team gathers on the track, awaiting their instructions for the day. Today, during the relay drill, everyone will be receiving the baton, running 220 yards, and then handing off the baton to the next person. Mr. Frazier and Barbara will be evaluating the runner’s handoff skills, as they have in previous years. Mr. Zunde will be working with, and ranking, the field athletes. A lot of effort is being put into finely tuning the team this year. Mr. Frazier will announce the reason why in just a moment.

Once the team is all together, Mr. Frazier makes the announcement, “this year, we are in the fortunate position to shut out several teams. I cannot tell you how rare, if not impossible, that is in a high school track and field meet. For those of you who do not know, a shut out is where one team takes first, second, and third place in every single event. Our first opportunity will be in one week against Mark’s favorite team, Centerville High School. From what I can tell, we can sweep every event. But, in order to do so, we need a strong team in every relay event.” Mr. Frazier asks the team, “are you up for it?” The team cheers, and everyone is now highly motivated to perform well in the relay drills. The field athletes follow Mr. Zunde, and the runners prepare for the relay drill.

Mr. Frazier tells the runners that initially three batons will be used for the drill, and that he might add another baton later once the field spreads out. He explains that there are no teams, but that the runners will line up, half on one side of the track, and half on the other side. The next runner in line will receive the baton from whoever comes down the track.

Barbara takes half of the runners to the far side of the track. Mr. Frazier will be in contact with Barbara using a two-way radio, occasionally arranging certain handoffs. The drill is now ready to begin.

Kathy, Paula, and Erika begin the relay drills. Mr. Zunde has everyone convinced that the ladies should go first, and the relay drills are no different. On the far side, they hand off to Hoffer, Elliot, and Johnson, which goes rather well. Next up to receive the baton is Eddie, Braden, and Mark, in that order. Mr. Frazier has his eye on Elliot's handoff. He is well aware of the skill level of everyone else. Elliot's handoff to Eddie goes well, and Mr. Frazier is quite impressed. Eddie, Mark, and Braden now each run their leg of the relay drill. When these three runners are on the track, there is more going on than just a drill. They are competing against each other.

At the far side of the track, the runners get ready to receive the baton. Eddie approaches first, and enters the transition zone. The handoff occurs quickly, and Eddie gets off the track. Mark and Braden are nearly head to head, with Braden enjoying a slight lead. Two runners get onto the track to receive the batons from Braden and Mark. Braden, on the inside, appears as if he will hand off first.

As Mark and Braden approach the transition zone, a third runner unexpectedly enters the track just as the two runners expecting to receive a baton take off. Braden, attempting to avoid the idiot who entered the track, violently collides with him. Immediately afterward, a second collision occurs involving the unexpected runner with Mark, who forcefully shoves the runner off to the side. The runner, laying face down on the track, is none other than Jimmy O'Brien, who was cut from the team on the first day by Mr. Frazier before tryouts ever began.

O'Brien, perhaps, thought that he could somehow sneak back onto the team, and be unnoticed by anyone. O'Brien is in contention with Chuckie to be the most inept student in school. Today, O'Brien has the upper hand in that competition. Yesterday, it was Chuckie, who landed himself in jail.

O'Brien lays motionless on the track, causing concern amongst many of the runners. Barbara checks O'Brien, who fortunately still has a pulse. At least he's still alive, but some would argue that he's always been brain dead. Today's blunder by O'Brien would provide substantial evidence of that theory. Barbara radios Mr. Frazier, telling him that there is a man down on the track. Mr. Frazier blows his whistle, halting the drill, and jogs over to see what happened.

Barbara asks Braden and Mark, "how about you guys? Are you okay?" Mark replies, "yeah. I didn't know we were trying out for football today."

Braden replies, "I'm gonna be okay. Just as soon as I kick his puny little ass, I'm going to be okay! Someone wake that asshole up so I can kick his ass and knock him out again!" Braden has a good reason to be upset. This is not the first time that Braden has collided with O'Brien on the track. It happened once before during indoor track tryouts. O'Brien did not fare well during that collision either. It does not appear that the outcome of this collision will be any better.

Mr. Frazier arrives and, seeing O'Brien, exclaims, "why is he out here? He was cut!" Barbara, attending to O'Brien, tells Mr. Frazier, "he's unconscious. His pulse is 105 and regular, and respiration rate is nineteen. The collision was pretty hard. We'd better not move him. He probably has a concussion and he could have a fracture somewhere." Mr. Frazier agrees, and tells Mitchell to go inside and have someone call for an ambulance.

O'Brien lies on the track, and cannot be readily aroused. Mr. Frazier throws his hands in the air, and exclaims, "what else can go wrong! Three days of tryouts and practice, and three casualties." Mark replies, "O'Brien is collateral damage. Kind of like road kill." Braden comments, "you got that right, bro."

O'Brien is laying on the outside of the track, attended to by Barbara until the paramedics arrive. Mr. Frazier tells the runners to continue the drill, but to remain staggered on the track. Mr. Frazier asks Kathy and Paula to temporarily take over Barbara's duties of evaluating the handoffs, which they are glad to do. Mr. Frazier also tells the runners to try to avoid running over O'Brien a second time.

The paramedics arrive, and attend to O'Brien, who is still unconscious. They place O'Brien's neck in a hard cervical collar, in case he suffered a neck fracture. They then carefully place him on a stretcher, stabilizing him with restraints. The paramedics tell Barbara that she was wise in her decision to not move him. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier watch, as they load O'Brien into the ambulance, and take him away.

Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "O'Brien is no longer eligible to try out for any team. And, give that idiot an F in gym class. That goes for that Chuckie guy too." Mr. Frazier replies, "they've both got a solid D right now. That won't be too hard." Mr. Frazier mentions, "I cut O'Brien before tryouts began. He didn't show up yesterday. I have no idea why he was even here today." Mr. Zunde responds, "well, then, perhaps he learned something today. Or, then again, perhaps not. Stupidity seems to be his strong point, just like his father."

The relay drills continue in full swing now that the hazard has been removed from the track. Mr. Frazier gathers enough statistical data to

develop the relay team options for the upcoming meets. While he is watching the relay drill, Mr. Frazier is again contemplating another Kill the Man with the Ball session tomorrow during practice. That worked well last year. It is unfortunate, however, that the baseball team is not much competition for the track team. With a team that is in better shape, such as the basketball team, the runners will likely get a better workout.

Mr. Frazier calls an end to the day, and informs everyone that the team is looking strong. On the way to the locker room, Mr. Frazier tries to ascertain information regarding how O'Brien snuck out onto the track. None of the upperclassman seems to remember seeing him, either in the locker room or on the way out to the track. Some of the freshmen were saying that he was walking out to the track with them, and was acting kind of odd. They report that they did not know who he was.

Practice for the rest of the week goes very well. The team is very well prepared to meet Centerville on Thursday, and is expecting to take every event.

After a hard week of work, Kathy tells Eddie, "hey, I need a beach trip." Eddie asks, "where? Here? Hawaii? Somewhere new?" Kathy replies, "I don't know. Maybe we can get to the Carribean or somewhere in the islands." Eddie replies, "we can try it out, and see if there's a portal there." Kathy asks, "do you want to see if Paula and Mark want to go?" Eddie replies, "sure! We can ask them. Who knows, maybe they're already there." Kathy calls Paula, checking to see if they want to go. It didn't take much for Kathy to convince Paula to go with them. Kathy and Eddie gather up their stuff, and head to Mark's house.

When they arrive at Mark's house, Paula asks, "so, where are we going again?" Kathy, looking at a map, suggests, "we can try the Bahamas, the Dominatrix Republic, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, Saint Thomas, or Saint Anybody for that matter. Just about anywhere we want to try." Eddie laughs, and asks, "the Dominatrix Republic? Really?" Kathy, looking at the map again, replies, "oops. The Dominican Republic." Mark mentions, "Saint Thomas sounds like a good one. There are supposed to be some nice beaches there." Kathy replies, "that sounds good to me!" Everyone agrees, so Saint Thomas it is.

They all ride to the portal with their bicycles. When they get there, Paula does the honors, raising her right hand in the air, saying, "take us to Saint Thomas, today, in the morning." They immediately find themselves among three boulders arranged in the all too familiar configuration near a path leading to a side road. There is a lot of heavy vegetation in the area, which they make their way through in order to get to the road.

Once they get to the main road, they take a look around for a landmark in order to find their way back. Mark notices there are two tennis courts diagonally across the street on the right, which should serve as a good landmark. They take a left and follow the road to see where it goes. A few open air busses are also going in that direction, and the riders are dressed in swimsuits. They now know they are going in the right direction.

Riding for less than a mile, they find themselves at a beach, which is exactly what they are looking for. The beach is called Magens Bay, and seems to be a nice weekend hot spot. They ride into the park and pick out a spot in the sand under a palm tree. Next to them is one of the lifeguard stands.

Kathy exclaims, "Eddie, just look at this place! It's beautiful!" Eddie replies, "wow! I've never seen a beach like this before!" Paula mentions, "this beach is definitely made for relaxing." Mark tells Paula, "yeah, I'd say." They lay out their towels, sit back, and take in the scenery for a while.

After they lay on the beach for an hour or so, Kathy asks Eddie, "can we just take this beach home with us?" Eddie replies, "it's not any harder to get here than to our beach." Mark adds, "it's actually easier to get here. It's only a mile from the portal." Paula mentions, "we can come here in the Winter months too, since it's in the tropics." They all like Magens Bay. It is perhaps the most laid back and relaxing beach they've ever seen.

They lay on the beach a while longer, then decide to go into the water. The water is warm, and the waves are a few inches high, not a few feet high like their beach back home. Swimming far out into the water, they get a good view of the beach from a different perspective. Kathy really likes Magens Bay. She especially likes the view of the beach from the water. They swim back to the beach, and lay out on their towels for an hour or so.

Eddie casually asks Mark, "so, did you survive your collision, bro?" Mark asks, "collision?" Eddie replies, "yeah. With O'Brien the other day." Mark laughs, and says, "oh yeah. That was really weird. I was running and, all of a sudden, there he was. He came out of nowhere. He definitely went down hard." Kathy mentions, "last year, Mr. Zunde said O'Brien is too dangerous on the track for exactly the same reason. He caused a collision with Braden." Paula mentions, "that's three men down in one week. I definitely don't have a good feeling about O'Brien though." Eddie corrects Paula by asking, "three men?" Paula laughs, and replies, "good catch. You definitely have a point. I stand corrected."

Lunchtime comes, and there is only one choice for food, which is the concession stand at the beach. They take a walk over, enjoying the walk under the palm trees. Kathy takes almost no time to decide that she's having pizza. Everyone joins Kathy in her decision, so they get three large pizzas and drinks, and bring it back to their towels.

Kathy notices the lifeguard has been sitting on his stand all morning, and hasn't eaten anything. They offer the lifeguard some pizza, who gladly accepts. The lifeguard tells them that his relief hasn't shown up yet, so he is unable to leave. They have lunch and talk with the lifeguard for a while, and find out that he is a senior in high school. He tells them that he really likes his job on the beach but, after he graduates, he also wants to get a job during the week selling jewelry in one of the shops where the cruise ships dock.

The lifeguard notices their bicycles, and asks Eddie, "where did you guys get the nice bikes?" Eddie mentions, "we bike everywhere. We brought them with us." The lifeguard, pointing to his bicycle locked to a tree, tells Eddie, "that's mine over there. It's been very faithful. It gets me all over the island." The lifeguard's bicycle is a well-equipped Bianchi touring bicycle. Eddie tells the lifeguard, "that is seriously a really good bicycle!" The lifeguard replies, "I bought it off a guy. It came in on a boat a year ago. I gave the guy seventy-five dollars for it." Eddie tells him, "you definitely got the better end of that deal." The bicycle the lifeguard owns was probably stolen from the States, and shipped to the islands for profit, along with a few thousand other bicycles that landed somewhere in the Caribbean.

After lunch, everyone relaxes for a while longer, just enjoying the scenery. They go in the water a few more times, but, the afternoon comes to a close and they have a whole day ahead of them back home.

Kathy mentions to the group, "they ought to rename this place to 'Sleepy Beach' or something. This place is way too relaxing." Paula agrees, mentioning, "this is the most relaxing beach I've ever been to. Maybe even the most relaxing place I've ever been."

They head out, and ride up to the road in search of the portal. The ride back along the narrow road goes quickly. Seeing the tennis courts ahead, they slow down and look for the side road leading to the portal. Mark spies the road, and they take the short ride to the portal. Everyone enters the portal, and finds themselves back home again.

Eddie and Kathy ride back to Kathy's house, where she goes to her room and gets her diary. Eddie and Kathy sit outside by the pool, as she traces a map of Saint Thomas onto the next blank page in her diary. She marks the location of the portal, and writes the words, "may need a

machete” on the page. After all, there was a lot of dense vegetation in the area. She draws a second map of the Magens Bay area, including where they found the tennis courts. On the back of the page, she draws what she remembers of the beach, and the location of the concession stand. She draws a picture of a pizza, and draws an arrow connecting the pizza with the concession stand. Eddie is impressed with Kathy’s artwork.

After Kathy is done, she puts her diary back in its safe place. Kathy and Eddie return to the back yard. Eddie asks, “now what are we doing?” Kathy replies, “right now, we are checking for dead frogs.” For the remainder of the morning, Kathy and Eddie get the pool in tip-top shape for the upcoming Summer. Kathy is not about to have another run in with a dead frog this season.