

Eddie, The Senior Year

Chapter Six Graduation

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With a day off before graduation, Eddie heads out on a short bicycle ride. Eddie sees Ralph Myles, the high school honors student who is now in college, working on his Volkswagen Beetle in his driveway. Eddie stops to see what Ralph is up to. It's been three years since Eddie has seen Ralph. Riding into the driveway, Eddie asks Ralph, "hey, do you remember me?" Ralph replies, "yeah! You're Eddie. I remember you! It's been a while. How have you been?" Eddie replies, "great, and you?" Ralph responds, "well, I'd be a lot better if I can get my car started. It hasn't been starting well recently. And, it's been running a little rough." Eddie and Ralph talk for a few minutes, but then Ralph has to get back to working on his car.

Fortunately, for Ralph, the right person just rode up his driveway. Wanting to help, Eddie asks, "what's it doing?" Ralph tells Eddie, "it just won't start well, and the problem is getting worse." Eddie tells Ralph, "crank it. Let me hear it." Not having much confidence that Eddie can be of help, Ralph cranks the engine. The engine does not start, but Eddie clearly recognizes the sound coming from the engine. Knowing exactly what the problem is, Eddie tells Ralph, "it's your air filter. It's clogged." Not very confident in Eddie's assessment, Ralph asks, "how do you know?" Replying confidently, Eddie tells Ralph, "when you crank an engine, you should hear the air flowing into the carbs. Your engine sounds like it's choking."

Eddie tells Ralph, "take out the air filter, and let's see if it cranks." Still not having much confidence in Eddie's assessment, Ralph removes the air filter. But, at this point, anything is worth a try. Eddie and Ralph take a look at the air filter, and both Eddie and Ralph can see that the filter is in need of replacement. Ralph turns over the engine, and it cranks right up. Eddie tells Ralph, "there you go. Buy a new air filter and you'll be on your way back to college."

Giving Eddie some bad news, Ralph tells him, "I'm not exactly going back this next year." Eddie asks, "why not?" Ralph explains to Eddie, "I ran out of money, and my parents can't afford to send me next year. I can apply for a student loan but, even then, I won't get back into college until the Spring." Curiously, Eddie asks, "how much does a semester of college cost?" As Ralph is giving Eddie a breakdown of college expenses, Eddie thinks back to when the mechanic once told him that Ralph will be his accountant someday.

Compared with the amount of money that Kathy told Eddie he has, college tuition seems like a drop in the bucket. Putting an offer on the table, Eddie tells Ralph, "hey, I could loan you the money." Curiously, Ralph asks, "do you have that much money?" Eddie assures Ralph, "yeah, and a lot more. I opened a brokerage account when I was sixteen. I put most of the money I made cutting lawns into the stock market. The stocks have gone way up." Having no idea at all that Eddie had any financial aptitude, Ralph replies, "wow! And, all this time, I thought you cut lawns just to make spending money."

Since he is an accounting major in college, Ralph asks Eddie, "what are the terms?" Not understanding Ralph's terminology, Eddie asks, "the terms?" Ralph replies, "yeah. The interest rate, the amortization schedule, due dates, and that sort of thing." Not wanting to be bothered with the businessman's jargon and protocol, Eddie tells Ralph, "just pay me back when you get the money." Shocked, Ralph replies, "really?" Eddie replies, "sure. You're a nice guy. I wouldn't do the same for Steven Wagner." Thinking back to his senior year, Ralph remembers when Wagner was letting the air out of his tires, and Eddie came by, forcing Wagner to pump the tire up with a bicycle pump.

Ralph quickly takes Eddie's deal. Eddie rides home to get the money, and Eddie writes out an IOU on paper. He has Ralph sign the paper, which Ralph is glad to do. Eddie tells Ralph there is, however, one condition. Ralph cannot tell anyone that it was Eddie who loaned him the money. Ralph gladly agrees. It's now back to college for Ralph in a few months. But, before Ralph goes back to college, he must first take a trip to the bank to deposit the money. In order to get to the bank, Ralph first makes a trip to the auto parts store to buy a new air filter.

Later that day, the final grades come out and Eddie, along with the rest of the track team, gets an A in physics. In fact, the track team did quite well in all their classes. Mr. Crum, the wretch that he is, examined the grades of everyone on the track team. Noticing everyone on the track team got an A in physics, he is a bit puzzled. After all, in Mr. Crum's mind, athletes are dumb and, if they do graduate, it is usually by the skin of their teeth.

Looking for an explanation of how the track team could do so well in physics, Mr. Crum calls Miss Amherst into his office. Mr. Crum begins by telling Miss Amherst, "I suppose you're wondering why I have called this meeting." Answering the principal's stupid opening line, Miss Amherst replies, asking, "did I not get my grades in on time?" Mr. Crum replies, "no, you got them in on time. But, I want an explanation of how the entire track team all got A's." Miss Amherst replies, "each one of them have earned it." Miss Amherst, who is not stupid, just backed Mr. Crum into a corner. Completely missing that he's just been set up, Mr. Crum replies, "what do you mean, they've earned it?" Miss Amherst replies, "exactly that. They earned the grade that they've received. Would you like to see the grade book?"

Annoyed at Miss Amherst's logic, Mr. Crum asks, "let me ask this another way. How could students with overall B averages get an A in an advanced class, like physics?" Miss Amherst replies, "as I've said, they've earned it. The school's policy allows for up to 10 percent extra credit to be earned in physics, calculus, and any advanced placement college course. Their test grades were in the mid B range on average, except for Gary Mitchell, who has had a solid A all year. For the rest of them, they've participated in all the extra credit activities, such as the one you interrupted out on the track that day."

Mr. Crum asks, "wouldn't you agree that activity was biased toward the track athletes?" Miss Amherst replies, "no. Not at all." Mr. Crum, in a demanding tone, tells the physics teacher, "please elaborate further. I'm having a hard time understanding this!" Miss Amherst explains, "Michael Nelson attempted to throw the shot-put during that experiment, and he couldn't throw it more than ten feet. I'm sure you'd agree that, with a poor performance like that, it would be difficult to obtain statistically relevant data. Not to mention, an untrained athlete would fatigue rather quickly, introducing another variable into the equation."

Mr. Crum asks, "have any other students participated in these so-called extra credit assignments?" Miss Amherst replies, "yes. Lynn Berson and Penny Hart, the photographers for the school newspaper and yearbook, have used their photography skills multiple times during the year to document a few of the lab exercises. And, Paul Silverman, whose father is an ophthalmologist, brought in several lenses for our experiments on refraction. And, Dr. Silverman was kind enough to donate the lenses to the school. I can go on." Wanting to catch Miss Amherst in some inconsistency, Mr. Crum replies, "give me another example."

Referring to another student, Miss Amherst explains, "Wendy Waters' average in the class was a 98 before any extra credit assignments were factored in. After the extra credit was added in, her average was a 108." Mr. Crum asks, "and, exactly what did Wendy do to earn extra credit?"

Miss Amherst explains, "Wendy has a very elaborate telescope that can be fitted with a 35-millimeter camera. Wendy and Lynn Berson got together and took photographs of the moon through Wendy's telescope, indicating the inclination and declination of the moon on seven successive days. From the information gathered, we derived a laboratory experiment and calculated that the moon circles the Earth every 27.32 days. It's in the syllabus. Lynn also got an awesome photograph of the moon. Would you like to see it?" Mr. Crum brashly replies, "no. That won't be necessary."

Mr. Crum sits back, contemplating his next move. Before Mr. Crum can think of his next question, Miss Amherst informs Mr. Crum, "I even gave Andrew Goldstein 10 percent extra credit for being on the business end of an inelastic collision with Axel Braden's fist. We used that incident to demonstrate the difference between an elastic and inelastic collision. And, Andrew demonstrated to the class a real life experience of extracting the square root of a negative number. Unfortunately, even with the extra 10 percent, Andrew Goldstein still did not come close to passing the class." Miss Amherst's comment referencing an irrational number flew right over Mr. Crum's head.

Mr. Crum, who has lost the battle interfering with athletics, has now apparently moved his attack to the academic realm. Losing his battle today, Mr. Crum dismisses Miss Amherst, telling her, "I was just doing a few random checks." Miss Amherst doesn't believe Mr. Crum for a moment, but she, for some reason, apparently does not care. Perhaps sitting with the superintendent of schools during each track meet might give a hint as to why Miss Amherst cares not what Mr. Crum thinks.

With the school year officially over, graduation is right around the corner. Whenever the weather is nice, graduation is held out on the track. There is much more seating in the stands than in the school's auditorium, so the track is the preferred place to hold graduation. This year, the weather will be beautiful, so Eddie and the tribe will be graduating on the track, a place that is all too familiar to them.

On the morning of graduation, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, Mitchell, and Bobby B. are all ready to graduate and move on. Eddie has told everyone that, if Mr. Crum's name is on his diploma, he is tearing it up and throwing it away. Braden has stated that he will do the same. This year, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara will be watching from the bleachers, a place that they rarely sit for any event.

The bleachers begin to fill with the parents and friends of the graduates. Eddie's and Mark's parents find Kathy, Paula, and Barbara, and sit with them. Eventually, the parents of the rest of the tribe find Kathy, Paula and the rest of the group, and sit with them in what appears to be a

reunion of one of the State invitational meets. This group of parents has gotten to know each other quite well over the last few years.

Of particular interest, Mr. and Mrs. Black will not be attending today's ceremony. Chuckie failed physical education and physics, and will be retaking those subjects this Summer if he can stay out of jail. And, Chuckie's sidekick, Goldstein, will also be in school this Summer, also failing a few subjects, including physics and physical education.

The commencement activities begin, and everyone focuses their attention to the stage. To begin the ceremony, everyone says the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the band playing the National Anthem and God Bless America. The invocation this year is again given by Dr. Kristibueze Akinmola. Dr. Akinmola is the father of Adekunle Akinmola, so the track team knows him well. After the invocation, the superintendent of schools gives her address, followed by the valedictorian's and salutatorian's address.

The ceremony gets underway, and the graduates walk up one by one to receive their diplomas. As in every school, they are called up in alphabetical order, which means Eddie leads the tribe.

Mr. Crum, the principal, calls Eddie's name. Walking up onto the stage, Eddie is wearing every track medal he's ever won, which, for some reason, irritates Mr. Crum. Eddie attempts to give Mr. Crum a fist bump instead of a handshake. Eddie comments into the microphone for everyone to hear, "what's this, Crum? No fist bump? I should send you to detention." The audience and graduates laugh, as Eddie takes two steps to receive his award for putting up with Mr. Crum for four years.

The school superintendent, Dr. Noreen Brooks, smiles and hands Eddie his diploma, and whispers to Eddie, "take a look at the signatures." As he walks off stage, Eddie looks at his diploma, which is signed by Dr. Brooks, as everyone else's is. But, instead of being signed by Mr. Crum, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier's signatures are on Eddie's diploma. Eddie looks back and smiles at Dr. Brooks, and walks off stage, returning to his seat.

The ceremony moves on, and Mr. Crum arrives at calling Axel Braden's name. Braden, also wearing all his track medals today, walks up, and shakes Mr. Crum's hand. After shaking Mr. Crum's hand, Braden, speaking into the microphone, announces, "that's Axel Braden, chief ass kicker, and the State record holder in the 440-yard dash. Thank you very much." The audience and graduates cheer wildly for Braden, who is one of the most liked guys in the school. It's no surprise that Braden was voted the Most Popular Man on Campus by the senior class. This is the

second time Mr. Crum has been embarrassed this morning, and he's not liking it too much.

But, the next three members of the tribe, Robert Bradshaw, known as the shot-doc, or Bobby B., Eric Johnson, and Gary Mitchell do not embarrass Mr. Crum. Mr. Crum announces Mark Svoboda's name, and Mark walks up to receive his diploma. Suddenly appearing very concerned, Mark speaks into the microphone, and tells Mr. Crum, "uh oh. Someone's throwing the discus! We're in the red zone!"

Mark then points out a female athlete, standing on the discus pad 150 feet away, going into the wind up and spin, and releasing the discus. Mr. Crum panics, and exclaims loudly, "everybody duck! Watch out!" The discus, which turned out to be a Frisbee, sails gently through the air, landing 50 feet away. The graduates and crowd laugh at Mr. Crum, who knows he's been had. The female athlete quickly runs into the woods, pulling off one of this year's senior pranks.

When Wendy Waters' name is called, Mr. Crum can finally rest. Wendy, graduating summa cum laude, is the last member of the tribe to graduate today. Mr. Crum is probably glad to see this group graduate and get rid of them. But, graduation does not necessarily mean they're gone forever. After all, Barbara, Kathy, and Paula came back to help with the track team, and there was absolutely nothing that Mr. Crum could do about it.

After the closing ceremony, the caps fly into the air and the graduates all cheer. The parents come down from the bleachers and meet the graduates, teachers, and administrators. Mr. Zunde personally congratulates Eddie and the rest of the tribe. The superintendent, Dr. Brooks, comes over and tells Eddie, "I had special diplomas made up for some of the track team members. I would really hate for you to throw out your diploma because a certain person's signature was on it." Standing by, hearing what Dr. Brooks just told Eddie, are Mark and Braden. Looking at the signatures on their diplomas, Mark and Braden also see Mr. Zunde's and Mr. Frazier's signatures instead of Mr. Crum's. Seeing that really made their day.

While everyone is having a good time, Mr. Crum is trying to find out who was on the discus pad when Mark received his diploma. No one seems to know who it could have been. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara were all sitting in the bleachers, so they are not on the suspect list. Mr. Crum is sure that Mark knows who it was, but Mark insists that he doesn't know. Mr. Crum is certain that the discus thrower was Kathy, although many people tell Mr. Crum that Kathy was sitting in the bleachers. But, since there is no rule in his policy manual about throwing a Frisbee from the discus pad, there's really nothing Mr. Crum can do about it anyway.

After graduation, Kathy and Eddie head over to their new house, getting ready for the graduation party. The pool is warm, heated to a nice temperature, so everyone can stay in the water for as long as they want. Joe, from the pizzeria, is delivering the pizza, calzones, and side dishes. Joe heads back to the pizzeria, leaving Arianna, the waitress, at Eddie and Kathy's house for a while, to make sure everything goes smoothly.

Before the guests arrive, Kathy makes sure there are no dead frogs in the skimmers or in the pool, something she'll be doing for the rest of her life. The guests arrive one by one, which, for the most part, is the track team. Mark and Paula arrive first, and Eddie wastes no time telling Mark again that he pulled the discus prank off really well. Eddie asks Mark again who threw the Frisbee, but Mark's only answer to anyone who asks is, "you'll find out soon."

Braden and Wendy arrive, and Braden exclaims, "wow! This place is cool! This place kicks ass!" Johnson arrives with Barbara, who are also impressed by Eddie and Kathy's house. Bobby B. and Erika arrive next. Remembering last year's senior prank, the first thing everyone asks is whether Erika threw the Frisbee. Erika claims she didn't, telling everyone she was sitting with Kathy and Paula at graduation. Mitchell and Amber arrive, but no one asks Amber if she threw the discus. The discus thrower was blonde, and Amber is not remotely close to being blonde. A few other guests, including Gump, Hoffer, Tessa, and a few of Eddie's friends arrive, and the party is underway.

Wasting no time, Kathy and Paula reach for the first slice of pizza. Everyone else digs in, eating their favorite celebration meal. While they are eating, Eddie asks Mark, "so, when are you going to tell us who threw the discus?" Mark replies, "she's right here with us." Eyes look all around, and settle on Tessa. As Tessa stands up and takes a bow, everyone cheers. Tessa, the only other blonde female in the group, is the only suspect. Everyone should have guessed.

After lunch, the pool becomes the center of attention. Everyone gets in the water, relaxing for a while. Eddie tells Tessa, "we can have our rematch right here this Summer." Taking a look at the pool, Tessa exclaims, "no way, José!" Eddie smiles, and asks, "why not?" Tessa replies, "the pool is way too short. You'll have the advantage with your flip turn! We're having the rematch at the county pool! And, I've been working out on that cable thing you built for me!" Tessa is confident that she will beat Eddie this Summer.

While they are hanging around in the pool, everyone talks about what they are going to do after graduation. Johnson mentions he's going to the University, joining Barbara, Kathy, and Paula in the Exercise Science program. Eddie tells everyone that he's going to be working at Angelo's

Service Station, but everyone already knew that. Mark will be working with his father as a jobber, and will try to pick up some of his own work. Mitchell, the honors student, surprisingly is not going to college. Instead, he landed a job organizing charity races throughout the country, and will be running in them himself. Braden announces that he is joining the Navy, and will become the armed force's chief ass kicker. And, Bobby B. hasn't quite yet decided what he is going to do after high school.

Finding out that Bobby B. has no immediate plans, Mark tells him, "me and my dad are overloaded. If you want, you can help us out." Bobby B. asks, "what do you guys do?" Mark replies, "we're jobbers, and we have a lot of projects going on. One of our projects is building another storage building at the high school for the baseball team. It will be at the other end of the field, near the baseball diamond." Quite surprised at the offer, Bobby B. replies, "really?" Mark tells him, "yeah. And, we'll even pay you." Bobby B. asks, "what else do you guys do?" Mark explains, "everything having to do with construction. We mostly do commercial stuff these days. We have all the tools. All you have to do is get to the job site." Bobby B. tells Mark, "yeah, sure! I appreciate it! When can I start?" Mark replies, "anytime you want." Bobby B. now has a plan.

Fifteen minutes later, Mark and Paula are caught at one end of the pool whispering and clearly arguing with each other. Wondering what is going on between them, Kathy asks, "hey! What's up with you guys?" Without even thinking, Paula answers, "we're arguing about who's going to announce that we're getting married." Mark replies, "well, I guess that settles it." Paula, putting her hand over her mouth, exclaims, "oops!" Everyone hears Paula's unintended announcement, and cheers. Kathy laughs, seeing that she got that information out of Paula so easily, and cheers along with everyone else.

The party goes on until late afternoon, when the second phase of the party begins. Eddie and Kathy invited their parents to the party, along with Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, and Miss Amherst. Miss Amherst was put on the guest list for being so helpful with the track team this year. Not surprising to a few, Mr. Zunde arrives with Miss Amherst by his side. Mr. Zunde jokingly tells Eddie, "I'm sorry I'm a little late. I got stuck in traffic." Eddie asks, "did you have to wait for a squirrel to cross the road?" Mr. Zunde replies, "that, and a few chipmunks."

The word gets around quickly that Mark and Paula are getting married. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier are not surprised. Not surprisingly, everyone has a lot of questions about Mark and Paula's wedding, but Mark and Paula have no answers. Kathy and Eddie have their wedding plans all set, so they think. With every decision they make, two more things to be decided are placed on the table.

While they are relaxing in the pool, with his normal sense of humor, Mr. Zunde asks Eddie, “so, where is Mr. Crum?” Overhearing Mr. Zunde’s comment, Kathy replies, “he’s sitting in his house on Second Street, wondering who threw the Frisbee today.” Thinking that she made an impromptu comment, Mr. Zunde replies, “I remember when he bought that house. He thought the neighborhood would turn commercial, and he would get rich. It hasn’t happened yet.”

Totally shocked, Kathy exclaims, “wait! He really lives on Second Street? I was just joking!” Mr. Zunde replies, “I’m afraid it’s no joke.” Kathy exclaims, “those houses are haunted!” Paula, who has never seen Second Street, but has only heard about it from Kathy, exclaims, “yeah, I’d say! Mr. Crum is haunting them.” Kathy just learned something that she’d rather not have known, but it fits perfectly with Kathy’s suspicions about Second Street and Mr. Crum.

When the sun begins to go down, and most of the guests are gone, Kathy lies on the chaise lounge and waits for Katarina’s star to come out in the evening sky. The first star to appear in the evening sky has not yet been found by Kathy at their new house. Today, Kathy intends to find it. Eddie waits with her, as Mark and Paula float around in the pool. Finally, as Katarina’s star appears, Kathy exclaims, “there it is! I found it!” Appearing in the same place in the sky, Katarina’s star is faithful to shine, making Kathy as happy to see it as she was when she was a child.