

Eddie, The Mechanic

Chapter Three Autumn Semester

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The Autumn semester brings the usual activities during the first few weeks of high school. This year, Eddie and his classmates have all graduated and moved on. They have passed the torch to Eddie's brother John, Erika Gabriel, Amber Amy, Jimmy Hoffer, Tessa Klement, and Adekunle Akinmola.

Now that Mitchell has graduated, Akinmola is looking forward to a collection of gold medals this year in the distance races. John Elliot, a sprinter, looks promising as both a sprinter and distance man. George Livingston, a junior, and Tom Davidson, a sophomore, are also promising distance men. And, then there is Lucius Hill, running the 440-yard dash and 880-yard run, hoping to fill the shoes of both Braden and Johnson. New to the school is Paul Davida, a transfer student, who took fifth place in the 100-yard dash at the Spring invitational track meet last year.

Early during the first week of school, tryouts for the Autumn sports begin. Everyone trying out for a team heads to the locker rooms after school. The upperclassmen know the drill well. The freshmen, as usual, have a hard time figuring out what is going on. Mr. Frazier posted an announcement earlier in the week, and put out the word, that the track team will conduct practice over the Autumn semester.

Mr. Zunde makes the usual announcement, directing the students to the appropriate location for whatever sport they are trying out for. This year, however, Mr. Zunde adds to his announcement, "if you are trying out for the track team, you will meet in the auxiliary gym with the cross country team." And, with his usual commentary regarding golf, Mr. Zunde announces, "if you are trying out for golf, the bus will leave shortly. And, please make sure that you have the balls to play golf."

Mr. Frazier, along with Kathy, Paula, and Barbara, walks into the auxiliary gym, where Mr. Chubin, the cross country coach, is waiting for the athletes to arrive. Once everyone is seated, Mr. Chubin announces, “welcome to cross country tryouts. This year, we will be working out with the track team, which is here with us today. If you are on both the cross country team and the track team, you will be working out with the cross country team today. If you are on the track team, but not the cross country team, you will be working out with Mr. Frazier and his team assistants.” That is easy enough to understand, but someone will get confused and end up in the wrong place.

Mr. Chubin then announces, “if you are trying out for cross country, please follow me outside now.” The athletes trying out for cross country walk out of the gym with Mr. Chubin, leaving behind the athletes hoping to earn a spot on the track team this year.

Mr. Frazier takes the floor, and announces, “this year, we are going to work out three days a week during the Autumn semester before the indoor season starts. The reason I have initiated this change is to maintain our competitive edge. Last year, some of the other schools started holding practice in the Autumn. When the weather is nice, like today, we will work out on the outside track. If the weather is not conducive to running outside, we will be working out in the indoor arena.” Many freshmen are perplexed, hearing that, somewhere in the school, there is an indoor arena.

Mr. Frazier then instructs the athletes, “if you are a distance runner, Barbara will be your coach today.” Barbara waves to the athletes who are seated on the bleachers, identifying herself. Mr. Frazier then instructs the athletes, “if you are a sprinter, Kathy and Paula will be your coach today.” Kathy and Paula wave to the athletes, also identifying themselves.

Mr. Frazier then announces, “and, as for me, since Mr. Zunde is working with the football team this semester, I will be working with the field athletes. And, for those of you who don’t know Wendy, she is our team assistant.” Looking around the gym, Mr. Frazier asks, “where’s Wendy?” Kathy replies, “she kind of like graduated.” Mr. Frazier responds, “oh yeah! That’s right!” Down one team assistant, Mr. Frazier then instructs everyone to head out to the track.

On the way to the track, Mr. Frazier instructs Barbara to have the distance athletes run a mile for time. Outside of that, Mr. Frazier gives Barbara free license to tailor the workout any way she sees fit. As for the sprinters, Mr. Frazier asks Kathy and Paula to time everyone in the 100-yard dash, afterwards giving them free license to design the workouts. After working with the team for years, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara know exactly what to do. Mr. Frazier informs Kathy and Paula that the 440-yard

dash time trials will be done during the next practice session. With a few months of practice before the season begins, there is no reason to rush.

Out on the track, while the athletes are running a warm-up lap, Mr. Frazier gathers the field equipment from the storage building with the help of the field athletes. Seeing Erika among the field athletes, Mr. Frazier asks her, “how come you’re not out there running?” Erika replies, “I’m trying out for the shot-put, and the discus, and the javelin.” Without any solid shot-put talent for the indoor season, Mr. Frazier responds, “okay, that’s fair enough.” After all, with Bobby B. gone, someone has to take proper care of the shot-put. Mr. Frazier is no dummy. He knows what’s been going on with the shot-put for the last few years.

Once the equipment is brought out, Erika takes no time expressing her interest about stepping onto the shot-put pad. Erika asks Mr. Frazier, “can I try?” Mr. Frazier tells Erika, “sure. Go ahead,” as everyone stands around to watch. Erika, looking a lot stronger than when she kicked the shit out of Chuckie two years ago, steps onto the shot-put pad. Tossing the shot-put into the air a few times like it is a softball, Erika is ready to see what she can deliver. Erika throws the shot-put with a technique that is unmistakably identical in every respect to Bobby B’s. The shot-put soars through the air, landing a lot farther than anyone ever expected.

Erika holds one end of the tape, as Mr. Frazier takes the measurement. Looking back at Erika, Mr. Frazier makes sure she is holding the tape at the inside edge of the circle. Mr. Frazier stands up and exclaims, “fifty-one feet, nine inches! Did everyone hear that? Fifty-one feet, nine inches!” On his way back to the shot-put pad, Mr. Frazier is exclaiming, “did everyone see that?” Erika’s throw was about five feet off of the high school shot-put record for girls, and would be a highly competitive throw at most meets.

Erika asks Mr. Frazier, “was it good enough?” Mr. Frazier tells her, “yes! That was more than good enough!” Erika tells Mr. Frazier, “Bobby showed me how to throw it this Summer. We’ve been practicing a lot.” Mr. Frazier replies, “well, he certainly did a great job!” Erika always tends to underestimate her abilities. Erika then asks, “so, maybe I can throw the shot-put?” Mr. Frazier replies, “yes, you may certainly throw the shot-put!” Erika smiles, and exclaims, “yes!” Mr. Frazier tells Erika to go over to Kathy and Paula, get timed in the 100-yard dash, and then come back for a few more throws.

It doesn’t take Mr. Frazier much time to realize that by starting practice in the Autumn, he is under a lot less pressure to get the team together and events assigned by the first meet. By the time the indoor season arrives, he will have a good idea of everyone’s abilities. And, with three excellent team assistants, his job is certainly made easier. Mr.

Frazier figures that, if he can have one assistant coach present during each practice, everything will run smoothly.

Over on the track, Kathy and Paula time the athletes in the 100-yard dash. John Bogenskaya, a sophomore this year, is on track to be the team's star sprinter. Hoffer, who is now a senior, is pushing John to his limit. They are both in contention to hold the title of the fastest guy in the school. Complicating matters for that title this year is Paul Davida, a transfer student who is ranked as the number two seed in the State. Davida is ranked just below Mikhail Sokolov, who runs for Liberty High School and is this year's top seed. During last year's Spring track invitational meet, Kathy suspected that John and Hoffer can both beat Davida. She will now find out whether she was correct.

Standing behind the blocks are John, Hoffer, Davida, Elliot, and, believe it or not, Eddie. Eddie, who had some free time, thought he'd come over and somehow help out with the team. Eddie figures he could use the workout since the University is interested in him. Kathy's idea of Eddie helping out is to set the pace for the race. Catching a glimpse of the line up, Mr. Frazier tells the field athletes that he'll be right back, and heads over to the finish line. This is one race Mr. Frazier certainly does not want to miss.

Running up to the finish line, Mr. Frazier asks Kathy, "who's clocking who?" Kathy replies, "I'm catching John and Davida, and Paula's catching Elliot and Hoffer." Mr. Frazier asks, "how come Eddie is here?" Kathy replies, "he came by to help. So, I told him he can help by setting the pace. Maybe he'll make everyone run faster." Mr. Frazier asks, "who's clocking Eddie?" Kathy replies, "I was going to, but it's kind of hard working three stopwatches." Mr. Frazier tells Kathy, "I'll clock Eddie and whoever comes in second place as well." Mr. Frazier flat out knows Eddie will win this race. Mr. Frazier tells Kathy and Paula, "start your watches when you see the smoke from the starting pistol. I want accurate times."

At the starting line, Tessa announces, "on your marks." Eddie, who has had a lot more time to work out recently, is all fired up. Eddie has another agenda. He wants to go back to the University with Kathy, and run time trials with the University team. But, Eddie has not been on the track since last Spring. Eddie wants to know where he stands. And, a little practice before hand certainly can't hurt. When Tessa announces, "set," there is enough adrenaline at the starting line to send a man to the moon and back. The gun is fired, and the runners are out of the blocks.

In the lead, Eddie is tearing up the track. At 25 yards, John, Hoffer, and Davida fight it out for second place. At 50 yards, John takes a slight lead over Hoffer and Davida. Elliot, who is trailing behind, is still running a good pace. Far in the lead, Eddie is finding speed that he never knew he

had. At 75 yards, John is in second place and Hoffer is in third place. Davida, a yard behind Hoffer, is giving it the best he has.

Crossing the finish line first is Eddie. Taking second place is John, capturing the title of the fastest guy in the school. Hoffer finishes in third, a yard behind John. And, finishing in fourth place, one yard behind Hoffer, is Davida. Elliot, although he finishes in last place, delivers a highly competitive time.

All excited, Mr. Frazier asks, "what did you clock everyone at?" Taking a second look at his stopwatches, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "I clocked Eddie at a 9.2! John clocked at 9.5!" Mr. Frazier, impatient to hear the times asks again, "what did everyone clock at? What do we got?" Kathy announces, "I clocked John at 9.5 and Davida at 9.7." Paula announces, "I got Hoffer at 9.6 and Elliot at 9.8." Kathy tells Mr. Frazier, "those times are pretty consistent with what we expected." Last year, Kathy suspected that John and Hoffer could beat Davida, making Davida the fourth seed in the State, not the second seed. Today, Kathy finds out that she was, in fact, correct.

Eddie returns to the finish line, wondering what his time is. Kathy tells Eddie, exclaiming, "you ran a 9.2! Mr. Frazier clocked you!" No one is more accurate with a stopwatch than Mr. Frazier. Eddie replies, "wow! If I knew I was that fast, I would have asked the University for more!" Kathy tells Eddie, "they're giving you everything already! What more is there?"

Eddie then asks, "how did John do?" Kathy replies, "I clocked him at 9.5." Eddie asks, "did he win?" Kathy replies, "yeah. It was you, John, Hoffer, Davida, then Elliot." Eddie exclaims, "wow! Not too shabby!" Mr. Frazier heads back over to work with the field athletes, knowing that he has a great group of sprinters this year.

Kathy and Paula organize a few more heats for time. Waiting for the next heat, Kathy mentions to Eddie, "you really should consider running for the University." Sounding like a broken record, Eddie replies, "sure. As long as I don't have to go to classes and I get all A's."

Glancing over at the starting line, Kathy tells Eddie, "here it comes. The girl fight. Go run in this one too, hon." Eddie jogs over to the starting line. Tessa's and Erika's adrenaline levels rise as they suspect they will be running against Eddie. Hoffer also returns to the starting line, and will start this race.

The gun is fired, and the girl fight is underway. Eddie, not running his fastest, allows Erika and Tessa to trail him by about five yards. If there is any chance that Tessa or Erika can catch Eddie, they might try harder, which they do. This time, at the finish line, Tessa edges out Erika by a

few inches. Kathy and Paula record the times of the girl fight, but do not announce them.

David has quite the surprised look when he sees that Erika and Tessa finish about the same distance that he did behind Eddie. What David does not know is that Eddie intentionally ran in the upper nine-second range in this race, and that Erika and Tessa ran in the mid ten-second range. Kathy tells Erika and Tessa their times, but tells them to keep it a secret. Paula then announces, "it looks like the guys are going to have a lot of competition this year!" Everyone will find out the girl's times sooner or later. For today, thinking that Tessa and Erika set the bar a little higher this year will push the other athletes a little harder.

After the 100-yard dash heats are over, the athletes run a few drills on the track. Mr. Frazier comes over to Kathy and Paula to get a report on everyone's times for the day. Quite pleased with the results, Mr. Frazier can tell that the team is going to have a good season.

After practice, Eddie and Kathy head home. Kathy and Eddie have been making their own dinners in the evenings. After all, they can't eat pizza every night. Tonight, they will be preparing fresh vegetables, and chicken on the grill. Also making enough food for lunch the next day, they have gotten their routine down well.

During dinner, Kathy asks Eddie, "I wonder what kind of magical food preparation devices they'll have in the future." Eddie tells Kathy, "I remember seeing a movie in sixth grade about the future. You just pick what you want, push a button, and a dinner comes out of a hole in the wall." Kathy tells Eddie, "I'm not sure I would really believe that. But, it would be nice to have something to slice and dice vegetables and stuff like that." Eddie suggests, "we can go look someday." Kathy replies, "yeah, we need to do that."

After dinner, Eddie mentions, "we also need more vitamins. Maybe we can go tomorrow afternoon." Kathy asks, "why not now?" Eddie replies, "oh yeah. That's right. We can go whenever we want." Kathy mentions, "you know, the portal is a lot farther away now." Eddie replies, "really? Are you getting lazy, Katarina Karakova?" Kathy replies, "for your information, it's Katarina Bogenskaya now. And, no. I'm not getting lazy. Let's go!" Kathy and Eddie get their bicycles, and head over to the portal, which is more than twice as far away as it used to be.

Arriving at the portal, Kathy picks a date forty years into the future, on a weekday, at 10:00 a.m. They ride down the long road, arriving at Eddie's Service Station. Noticing the station is closed, Kathy tells Eddie, "hey, you took a day off!" Eddie replies, "good! I wonder where we are." Kathy, looking at the sign in the window, mentions, "look at that! You're

closed today!" Eddie and Kathy ride a bit farther, to the doctor's office. Fortunately, the doctor is open today. They pick up a good supply of vitamins and other supplements, and head back toward the portal. Passing the entrance to the parkway, they continue on to the mall.

Kathy and Eddie go into the mall, and look around for a while. Finding a kitchen store, they look around at all the gadgets that are available 40 years into the future. Kathy tells Eddie, "hey! Take a look at this. It's called a juicer. It makes juice out of everything." Taking a look, Eddie replies, "cool! I wonder if you can put a steak in it and make steak juice." Kathy replies, "yuk. Steak juice." Eddie points out, "I bet it would digest really well." Kathy agrees, telling Eddie, "you do have a point."

Eddie, finding a smaller juicer called a Nutribullet, tells Kathy, "hey, take a look at this one." Looking it over, Kathy tells Eddie, "it's kind of cute. I want one." Kathy picks up a Nutribullet, and they continue looking around. The next thing that catches Kathy's eye is a food processor, which slices, grates, shreds, and does everything else under the sun. Kathy tells Eddie, "hey! Check this one out. It does everything." Eddie mentions, "it looks like it will save a lot of time." Kathy replies, "yeah, that's the ticket. That's what I was hoping to find."

They look around the store, noticing all the cool gadgets of the future. Realizing that they can only carry so much back with them, Kathy tells Eddie, "let's get the food processor thing, the Nutribullet, and the juicer. We can always come back for more stuff." Eddie replies, "that sounds good." They check out at the counter, and ask for three bags, one for each item.

They head out on their bicycles, with Kathy carrying the vitamins and her cute Nutribullet, and Eddie carrying the food processor and juicer. The trip back to the portal goes a little slower than normal, but they manage well. Arriving at the portal, Eddie and Kathy are transported back to their time. On their way home, they pass by Mark's house, noticing that his truck is nowhere to be seen. Kathy was hoping Mark could drive their newly found goods back to the house. On the way, they pass by Kathy's parent's house, heading toward the school. Taking the back roads, they finally arrive home.

Kathy and Eddie unbox their futuristic kitchen items. As he is reading the instructions, Eddie mentions, "it sounds like nutrition is a big deal in the future." Kathy tells Eddie, "it's a big deal for us now. We must be way ahead of our time." As they are loading their dishwasher, Kathy mentions, "I hate to mention this, but did you notice how many overweight people there are in the future?" Eddie replies, "yeah. A lot of people look like the Chuckie." Kathy turns on the dishwasher, and they head out to the pool to enjoy a nice evening swim.

While working at the service station, Eddie is eating lunch when a familiar face walks in. Eddie asks the patron, "how's the car running?" Lynn Berson, who had her red Ford Mustang inspected by Eddie a little while ago, replies, "great." Lynn then tells Eddie, "and, hey! I have something for you guys," and shows Eddie the two photographs she took of her, Eddie, and Angelo in front of her car the day she got it. Eddie compliments Lynn, telling her, "wow! They came out really great!"

Looking around the office, Lynn tells Eddie, "you should put it on the wall, kind of like Joe does at the pizzeria." Eddie replies, "that's a great idea! We should start a wall of pictures. Yours will be the first!" That would be easy enough to do. There is an undecorated blank wall in the office that would be the perfect place to hang pictures of happy customers. It's a sure bet that a picture of Mr. Crum will never make it to the wall.

Eddie asks Lynn, "so, what's a good camera to get?" Lynn replies, "well, that depends on how much you want to spend. Any of the big name SLRs will give you a really great photograph. But, I have a Nikon because the lenses are really smooth. If you get an SLR, make sure it has an automatic mode. There are some times that you don't have the time to mess with the controls."

Eddie, remembering that someday he will buy the service station from Angelo, thinks Lynn's idea of having a wall of photographs is a great idea. Eddie tells Lynn, "I think I'm going to pick one up soon." Lynn makes the offer to Eddie, "if you want, I can develop your film and make your photos if you want. I'll give you a good deal, and I'll even pick up and deliver for you." Eddie graciously replies, "sold."

Angelo walks in, and Eddie tells him, "hey! Take a look at the pictures Lynn took. She made copies for us." Looking at the photographs, Angelo exclaims, "I really like them! They're great! We should hang them on the wall." Lynn smiles, and is glad to hear that Angelo came up with the same idea she did. Angelo mentions, "we need to get a camera, and take pictures of our customers and put them up on the wall." Hearing that Angelo would like to have a wall of photographs, Eddie tells Angelo, "I'll work on that." Lynn, glad that her work is appreciated, fills up her tank, and heads off to her photography classes.

Kathy, Paula, and Barbara each work one or two days a week with the high school team. On one particular day, however, Mr. Frazier asks all three team assistants to be present. The special agenda today is the team will be running relay drills, focusing on proper handoff technique. To Mr. Frazier and his team assistants, it's the same drill, but with a different group.

During this drill, each athlete will be running 220 yards, handing off the baton, and getting back in line to receive the baton again a little while later. Kathy and Paula will be at one transition zone, and Mr. Frazier and Barbara will be along the back straightaway at the other transition zone. At each transition zone, the coaches will be looking at two things. The first is how well the handoff is executed. The second is checking for any break in cadence. A seamless handoff, with no break in cadence of either runner, is the goal. Mr. Frazier even brings the two-way radios to facilitate communication between the two coaching groups.

The drill begins with two runners on the track, initially staggered at a 110-yard interval. With two batons in service, the drill goes fairly well. Mr. Frazier notices that Erika, Tessa, and Hoffer hand off seamlessly to each other. They have been working together for years. Mr. Frazier also notices that Davida has been taught a different handoff technique, which does not lend itself to an easy transition between runners of different heights. Mr. Frazier shows Davida the preferred technique, and tells him to practice it and learn it.

A few minutes into the drill, Kathy radios to Mr. Frazier, “trouble on the way at twelve o’clock.” Mr. Frazier replies, asking, “what’s up?” Kathy replies, “that old Crum is headed out to the track.” Mr. Frazier radios back to Kathy, “I’m sure he’ll be headed my way. I’ll take care of him.” Kathy radios to Mr. Frazier, “he’ll probably walk through the red zone to get there.” Mr. Frazier replies, “as Mr. Zunde would say, that would be his problem, not mine.” Mr. Crum, who has a bit of a waddle to his walk since being hit by the discus, can only be headed out to the track to cause trouble.

Mr. Frazier radios to Kathy, “John is coming around the track. Have him hand off to Erika. When she comes around here, I want to see Erika’s handoff to Elliot.” Kathy replies, “will do.” Kathy tells Erika, “John is on his way around. He’s handing off to you. You’ll be handing off to Elliot.” Erika gets on the track, watching for John. Kathy radios to Mr. Frazier, “Davida is headed your way.” Mr. Frazier will decide to whom Davida will hand off.

Approaching the track, Mr. Crum yells out, “what’s going on here?” Paula yells back to Mr. Crum, “get back! Stay off the track!” Ignoring Paula’s warning, Mr. Crum crosses the track just as John is preparing to hand off the baton to Erika. Timing John’s pace, Erika turns around, and starts running. Not aware of the hazard on the track, Erika collides with Mr. Crum, as John prepares to deliver the baton. John, seeing Mr. Crum in front of him, also collides with the principal, thrusting him five yards down the track like a rag doll hit by a Mack truck. Mr. Crum goes down, and goes down hard.

Kathy yells out, “Crum, get your ass off my track!” At the back straightaway, Mr. Frazier blows his whistle, suspending the drill. As Mr. Frazier, Barbara, and a few runners jog to the other side of the track, Mr. Frazier radios to Kathy, “what happened? What’s going on over there?” Kathy radios back, “that old Crum stepped onto the track at the wrong time. He’s down.” Mr. Frazier speeds up, headed over to the other transition zone to see exactly what happened.

Kathy asks Erika and John, “are you guys okay?” John replies, “yeah, I’m good.” Erika replies, “me too. But, if I knew it was him, I would have taken him down.” Kathy replies, “good. I’m glad both of you are okay. Well, it’s no secret where you guys will be tomorrow morning.” Erika smiles, and informs Kathy, “I’ll be looking forward to it.” John adds, “I can’t wait. I hope it’s during social studies.” Apparently, John and Erika care not in the least bit that Mr. Crum will call them to his office.

Meanwhile, lying on the track, Mr. Crum yells out, “that was intentional. I saw that!” Kathy yells back at Mr. Crum, “the only thing that was intentional was you walking onto the track! So, get your ass off my track! Now! I have a drill to run!” Kathy has had enough of Mr. Crum. Kathy is no longer putting up with any of Mr. Crum’s shit. Mr. Crum yells at Kathy, “this is your fault! You should have stopped them.” Kathy exclaims, “shut up, Crum! Paula tried to stop you! And, by the way, what you’re mouthing off right now is called a double standard! Now, get your scrawny ass off my track!”

Almost to the scene, Barbara comments to Mr. Frazier, “it looks like Kathy is taking care of him.” Mr. Frazier replies, “yeah, I’d say. She’s saving me the trouble.” Mr. Frazier then yells out, “what’s going on here?” Kathy tells Mr. Frazier, “Crum walked into the transition zone, and got in Erika’s and John’s way. They collided.” Mr. Crum, still on the ground, yells out, “it was intentional. They knocked me down.” Having enough of Mr. Crum, Kathy exclaims, “shut up, Crum! And, as I said, get your ass off my track!” Mr. Frazier has to turn around to conceal his laughter at Kathy’s treatment of Mr. Crum.

Mr. Crum finally manages to stand up, and in a demanding tone, asks, “how come no one helped me up?” Kathy sarcastically replies, “maybe it’s because you’re acting like an irate little pussy. Don’t you think? Maybe just a little itty bitty bit?” Kathy then raises her voice, and exclaims, “now that you’re standing up, get your ass off my track! I’ve had enough of you. Now, get out of here!” Mr. Crum tells Kathy, “you can’t talk to me that way!” Kathy replies, “oh yeah? Really? Then stop me, junior.” A few seconds elapse, and Kathy offers up to Mr. Crum the highly sarcastic tribe trademark, and says, “waiting.” Mr. Frazier is perfectly happy to let Kathy and Mr. Crum battle it out.

Mr. Crum tells Mr. Frazier, “do something about her!” Mr. Frazier calmly asks Mr. Crum, “what would you like me to do?” Mr. Crum exclaims, “get her off my back!” Mr. Frazier, who now reports to Mr. Zunde, tells Mr. Crum, “why? You’ve been on her back for years. What do you expect? A cinnamon roll in return?” Mr. Crum, who forgot that Mr. Frazier now reports to Mr. Zunde, is at a loss for words. Kathy, however, is not. Kathy tells Mr. Crum, “I have a drill to run, so just get your ass back inside and get back to running your pussy factory!”

With no meaningful response from Mr. Crum, throwing the ball back into Mr. Crum’s court, Mr. Frazier asks, “what are you doing out here anyway?” Mr. Crum replies, “track is a Winter and Spring sport! This is the Fall!” Mr. Frazier replies, “so what.” Mr. Crum tells Mr. Frazier, “so, you can’t be practicing out here!” Mr. Frazier informs Mr. Crum, “football is a Fall sport, and they practice out on the football field all Summer.” Without even thinking, Mr. Crum exclaims, “that’s different!” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “no, it’s not. Just go back inside, and get out of our way.” Mr. Frazier blows his whistle, and yells out, “okay, everybody, let’s get back to the drill.”

During the exchange between Mr. Frazier, Kathy, and Mr. Crum, a few of the sprinters are standing around watching the verbal wrestling match. Erika tells John, “I’ve never seen Kathy this fired up before.” John informs Erika, “Mr. Crum really doesn’t want to be on the wrong end of an argument with Kathy. She’ll kick his ass.” Erika replies, “she’s definitely doing a pretty good job of it right now.” Davida asks, “who is that guy anyway?” John informs Davida, “that’s our principal, Mr. Crum. He hates athletes. He pulls this crap every year. And, he always loses. It’s really kind of funny to watch.” Lucius Hill, one of the best middle distance men the school has ever seen, comments, “that guy is going to get his ass kicked someday.” Erika grins, and points out, “he just did. By me and John.”

Mr. Crum yells out to Erika and John, “you two! Get to my office right now!” With an expressionless face, John stares right through Mr. Crum, saying absolutely nothing. Kathy tells John and Erika, “ignore him. Get back on the track. We have drills to run.” John walks back to the transition zone, continuing to stare through Mr. Crum. John, for some reason, worries Mr. Crum. It is perhaps because John slammed into Mr. Crum at full speed, with enough force to propel him five yards before he went down hard.

Kathy then yells out, “okay! You heard Mr. Frazier. Everyone back on the track and let’s get going!” Mr. Frazier and Barbara jog over to the transition zone on the back straightaway. Kathy and Paula return to their transition zone. It is clear to Mr. Crum that he is now being totally ignored, which does not sit well with him. His authority has been usurped

by a track coach, who he forgets now reports to Mr. Zunde, and an assistant coach who has lost any and all respect for him. And, if Eddie has not been a big enough problem for Mr. Crum in the last four years, John appears to be a bit too much for him to handle.

Mr. Crum, not liking his authority being undermined, walks over to the transition zone where Kathy, Paula, and more than a dozen athletes are preparing to continue the drill. Seeing Mr. Crum approach the athletes, Kathy yells out, "Crum, what part of 'get your ass off my track' don't you understand?" Mr. Crum, ignoring Kathy, focuses his attention on John and Erika, telling them, "you two! Get to my office immediately!" Kathy tells John and Erika, "ignore him." Kathy hands the baton to Erika, telling her, "okay, run." Erika takes off, as Mr. Crum yells out to her, "get back here now, young lady!" Kathy yells out to Mr. Crum, "Crum, get your ass off my track, unless you really enjoy digging gravel out of your face!"

With Erika headed down the track, Mr. Crum approaches John, and grabs him by the arm, exclaiming, "you! Get to my office right now!" John, bracing his foot on the inside curb of the track, shoves Mr. Crum away from him with more force than Mr. Crum could ever imagine. Mr. Crum sails across all six lanes of the track, landing his ass on the grass, again going down hard. Kathy radios to Mr. Frazier, "Crum just started something with John. Crum is down again. John is okay."

Silence falls over the athletes, as John walks over to Mr. Crum, who is lying on the ground. Lucius Hill comments, "oh shit! Here it comes." Mr. Crum yells to John, "you are in big trouble now!" John tells Mr. Crum, "shut up. If you ever touch me again, I will tear you apart, limb by limb. And, just so you know, I start where my brother left off. So, watch out." John walks away, leaving Mr. Crum laying on the ground. Great unimaginable fear comes over Mr. Crum hearing John's last comment. After all, Eddie never touched Mr. Crum.

Mr. Frazier arrives again, along with Barbara, seeing Mr. Crum lying on the ground. Mr. Frazier asks, "what happened this time?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "John started a fight with me!" Mr. Frazier nonchalantly tells Mr. Crum, "yeah, I'm sure he did. And, it looks to me like you lost." Mr. Crum starts yelling, but Mr. Frazier ignores him for the moment.

Paula explains to Mr. Frazier, "Mr. Crum grabbed John's arm, and John pushed him away." Quite puzzled, Mr. Frazier replies, "that's all?" Paula replies, "yeah." Mr. Frazier was expecting to hear that a much more severe altercation occurred between John and Mr. Crum.

John asks Mr. Frazier, "do you want me to belt Mr. Crum to the fence? That will keep him out of the way." Laughter breaks out among a few of

the athletes. Mr. Frazier, tired of Mr. Crum's interference on the track, replies, "if he gets in the way again, feel free."

Mr. Crum, defeated for the moment, exclaims, "I'm going to deal with every single one of you tomorrow morning," and walks away. After taking a few steps, Mr. Crum turns around, points his finger at the team, and exclaims, "and, none of you are going to get away with this!"

Practice continues for another half hour. During the drill, Kathy tells Paula, "I really wish I could be there tomorrow when Mr. Crum calls John and Erika into his office." Paula replies, "yeah, I'd love to watch as that one goes down." Paula asks, "and, what's up with John? He really let Mr. Crum have it." Kathy tells Paula, "yeah, I know. The first time he took out Crum was clearly a take down. That was no accident." Paula replies, "yeah, I know. I can't say I blame him." Kathy comments, "well, it's not surprising after all the shit Mr. Crum has put that family through."

The next day at school, the inevitable occurs. John and Erika are called to the principal's office. John got his wish, with the announcement coming during first period, which is social studies class. John is perfectly happy to miss Mr. O'Brien's class. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde arrive at the administration area, and wait along with John and Erika. Mr. Frazier has already explained yesterday's situation to Mr. Zunde. With the administrative change that occurred last year, Mr. Zunde is curious to hear Mr. Crum's complaint.

While they are waiting, Mr. Zunde asks Mrs. Marlowe, the school secretary, "is there a problem here today?" Mrs. Marlowe, finally understanding the character of whom she works for, whispers to Mr. Zunde, "they must have used the restroom without permission. Neither of them seems to have any overdue library books." Mr. Zunde replies, "oh, I see. At least there was no profanity used in the hallways." Erika cracks a smile, somehow knowing she is off the hook.

Mr. Crum opens his door, cordially inviting John and Erika into his office, announcing, "you two! Get in here right now!" John and Erika walk in, followed by Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde. John, never seeing Mr. Crum's damaged desk, immediately comments, "wow! So that's what my dad did to your desk! Nice work!" Mr. Crum tries to ignore the comment, but John just set the tone of the meeting for the next few minutes.

Mr. Zunde asks, "so, what seems to be the problem here today? Were John and Erika late for class?" Mr. Crum replies, "no! There was a serious incident that occurred yesterday!" Mr. Zunde replies, "oh, I see. They must have used the restroom without permission." Mr. Zunde tells Erika, "Erika, you're a senior now. You should know better. You should have gotten a restroom pass." Mr. Crum tells Mr. Zunde, "okay, enough with

the funny stuff.” Erika cannot help but to laugh at Mr. Zunde’s treatment of Mr. Crum.

Mr. Crum informs everyone, “yesterday, out on the track, Erika and John intentionally knocked me down. And, Kathy did nothing to stop it.” Mr. Zunde asks, “now, I’m kind of wondering. What were you doing out on the track anyway?” Mr. Crum replies, “I was investigating why track practice was being held. It’s not the track season.” Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Crum, “may I ask why that is any of your business?” Mr. Crum exclaims, “any use of the school facilities is my business!” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “okay. So, students were running around the track. So what?” Mr. Crum, attempting to change the subject, replies, “that’s not the reason we’re here!” Mr. Zunde certainly enjoys sending Mr. Crum’s meetings off track, and directing Mr. Crum down a dead end street.

Mr. Crum informs everyone, “the reason we’re here today is because Erika and John intentionally knocked me down on the track yesterday.” Antagonizing Mr. Crum further, Mr. Zunde asks, “how can you know that it was intentional?” Mr. Crum replies, “I saw it. It was intentional.” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “if there was a collision on the track, I’m guessing someone involved in the collision shouldn’t have been on the track in the first place. I’m going to take a wild guess, and say that it was you. The same thing happened to Jimmy O’Brien two years ago.” Tired of answering Mr. Zunde’s antagonistic questions, Mr. Crum exclaims, “this is my meeting! Please let me get on with it.” Erika replies with the highly antagonistic, “waiting.”

Mr. Crum, now fully knowing the meaning behind Erika’s comment, tells her, “since you are so anxious to talk, young lady, please inform me why you intentionally ran into me on the track yesterday.” Erika replies, “I can’t.” Mr. Crum asks Erika, “and, just why can’t you?” Erika replies, “because, I didn’t intentionally run into you. You got in my way. Just like you got in the way of the discus when Kathy threw it.” Mr. Crum quickly figures out that he is in for a rough time with Erika and John.

Not seeing that he is going to get anywhere with Erika, Mr. Crum asks John, “and John, how about you? Why did you intentionally knock me down?” John replies, “you were in my way. It was either me going down or you. I decided that it was going to be you.” Mr. Crum, thinking he is getting somewhere, asks John, “so, it was intentional?” John replies, “I pushed you out of my way so I wouldn’t get injured. That’s your tough shit. You were in my way. You shouldn’t have been on the track.” Mr. Crum sits back in his chair, proud that he has marginally extracted a confession out of John.

Mr. Crum moves on, asking John, “and, please tell me why you shoved me a second time.” John replies, “because you assaulted me.” Hearing

the words “assaulted me” drives a little bit of fear into Mr. Crum. Mr. Crum asks, “really, now? Explain to me, please, just how I assaulted you?” John replies, “you grabbed my arm. And, as I said yesterday, if you ever touch me again, I will tear you apart, limb by limb.”

Mr. Crum, turning to Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, asks, “did you hear that?” Mr. Zunde replies, “yes. It sounds to me like you must have really antagonized John out on the track yesterday. Perhaps you should have kept your hands off of him.” Mr. Crum quickly realizes he should have left Mr. Zunde out of the conversation. Mr. Crum has never won a verbal chess match with Mr. Zunde, and likely never will.

Getting back to his original line of questioning, Mr. Crum asks Erika, “so, you claim you did not intentionally run into me?” Erika tells Mr. Crum, “if I intentionally ran into you, I don’t think you’d be sitting here right now. You would have gone the way of Chuckie or the bitchkrieg.” Mr. Crum asks, “and, may I ask, to whom are you referring?” Erika replies, “the bitchkrieg. What’s her name? Terry Haynes, I think.” John adds, “yeah, if anyone intentionally ran into you, then you might just look like Goldshit did after Braden tried him out¹. Or, when Eddie kicked the shit out of the Chuckie. That’s what intentional looks like.”

Mr. Crum, realizing he is getting nowhere with Erika and John, bluntly announces, “I am going to have to suspend the both of you.” Knowing the announcement was eventually coming, Erika and John exchange a high-five, which they planned to do in advance after the edict was handed down. Mr. Crum brashly asks, “so, that’s what you think of my decision?” John replies, “yeah. But, next time, you’ll know what intentional really is.”

Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, “did I really just hear that?” Mr. Zunde replies, “it must be genetic. Just wait two years.” Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, “I think it’s time we put an end to this.” Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Frazier, “since you no longer report to him, would you like to do the honors? Or, shall I?” Mr. Frazier replies, “I think I will.”

Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “Mr. Crum, you are not suspending John or Erika. You have absolutely no authority out on the track. And, your own policy manual states that any altercation on the track is under my jurisdiction. I will take care of this myself. And, just for the record, I don’t need your help.” Mr. Crum tells Mr. Frazier, “you can’t tell me what to do! I’m the principal of this school!” Mr. Frazier reminds Mr. Crum, “if I remember correctly, I no longer report to you. And, as I said, I will take care of this. If you don’t like how I handle this situation, you can always

¹ Tried Him Out: Slang for kicking the shit out of someone.

appeal to the school superintendent. I'm sure she will be eager to hear your case."

Those were the last words Mr. Crum wanted to hear. Dr. Brooks, the school superintendent, handed down a severe reprimand to Mr. Crum last Spring semester. Mr. Crum has somehow since forgotten that Mr. Frazier, and the rest of the physical education staff, no longer reports to him. Perhaps the collision on the track may have damaged his memory. Or, on the other hand, the encounter with the discus two years ago could have left Mr. Crum with some residual brain damage.

Backpedaling, Mr. Crum asks Mr. Frazier, "okay, then. What do you plan to do about this?" Thinking for a moment, Mr. Frazier responds, "nothing." Mr. Crum angrily exclaims, "nothing? That's it? Nothing?" Mr. Frazier responds, "let me tell you something. You have your rule book sitting here on your bookshelf which, just like your desk, I see hasn't been repaired yet. We have rules in track. One of them is that, if you interfere with another runner on the track, you are disqualified from the race. No one is to interfere with a runner on the track under any circumstances. You had no business being on that track. You are the one who broke the rules, and interfered with runners on the track. Whatever happens to you after that is your problem, just like the red zone incident two years ago."

Mr. Crum sits in his chair, as silent as he could be. Now that he has been reminded that Mr. Frazier, along with the rest of the physical education staff, no longer reports to him, he is stuck between a rock and a hard place and he knows it. Mr. Crum will have a difficult time weaseling his way out of this one. But, nevertheless, he will try.

Mr. Crum, attempting to imitate Dr. Brooks, the superintendent, announces, "when students with a history of reasonably poor behavior band together to attack an administrator, it certainly raises a red flag and attracts a lot of attention. It is particularly noteworthy when that administrator has previously been the target of the same group of students." Mr. Zunde abruptly interrupts Mr. Crum, reminding him, "Crum, you're recycling a speech we've already heard last Spring from Dr. Brooks. You're not suspending anyone, so get to the end of the story already." Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "at least he now remembers exactly what Dr. Brooks said last year."

Mr. Crum continues, "okay, okay. For now I am not suspending anyone. But, I am very concerned about John's comment about tearing me apart, limb by limb." John interjects, "keep your hands off me, and you won't have a problem. That should be simple enough." Mr. Crum tells John, "it's attitudes like yours that makes this school an unsafe place." John replies, "and it's attitudes like yours that makes the track an unsafe place for all of us." Backed into another unwinnable argument, Mr. Crum

does the usual, telling Erika and John, “okay, enough of this. I have my eyes on both of you. You can go back to class now.”

Intentionally adding fuel to the fire, Erika tells Mr. Crum, “you know, if you really have that bad of a problem with me, you can always call my father down to the school. I’m sure John’s father would be glad to come down and talk to you too.” Mr. Crum brashly replies, “that won’t be necessary.” Mr. Gabriel, who is a police captain, and John’s father, who destroyed Mr. Crum’s desk years ago, are the last two people Mr. Crum wants to see in his office. Erika asks Mr. Crum, “then, why are you making such a big deal out of this?” Without any good answers, Mr. Crum replies, “I’m running this meeting, not you. And, we’re done here for now.”

Erika and John get their passes back to class. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde leave Mr. Crum’s office, and talk with Erika and John in the school lobby. During the conversation, Mr. Zunde asks, “I’m a little curious. Did either of you run into Mr. Crum intentionally?” Erika replies, “I didn’t. But, if I knew it was him, I would have taken him down.” John replies, “he was in my way. So, I had to take him out, otherwise I might have gone down. That guy is dangerous.” John also points out, “you saw what happened to Eddie, Mark, and Johnson last year when they went down. It was either me going down or Mr. Crum. So, I picked Mr. Crum.” Mr. Frazier replies, “well, better Crum than any of you guys.”

Erika then asks, “are we in trouble?” Mr. Zunde replies, “no, not at all. But, maybe Mr. Crum learned something out there yesterday.” Mr. Frazier, quite disgusted with Mr. Crum, mentions, “he hasn’t learned anything out there yet. Every time he comes out to the track, another problem surfaces.” Mr. Zunde comments, “that’s a good point. Perhaps we need to install an emergency alert siren near the track.” Erika and John head to class, and Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier head back to the gym.

Practice goes well for the rest of the Autumn semester. The team is getting stronger, and is already ready for their first meet, which is still more than a month away. There is no word on Sokolov, the State’s number one seed in a short sprint, but John and Hoffer are not worried. But, regardless of how good the competition is this year, Mr. Frazier and his team assistants have done all they could to prepare the team for the first meet.

Mr. Crum has learned to stay out of the way of the track team, at least for now. After the incident between Erika, John, and Mr. Crum, Mr. Crum has pretended to keep a low profile. No doubt, he’ll be back again in the Winter during the indoor track season to cause some sort of trouble. But, no one really cares. Mr. Crum’s fishing expeditions may have as well been done in the Sahara Desert, for he never catches anything.

Shortly before the Autumn semester is over, the annual high school faculty Christmas party is held in the teacher's lounge. In the past several years, Mr. Crum has been the recipient of a few gifts he would rather have not received. This year, he is very apprehensive about even attending the party. But, with Eddie and Kathy gone, he figures it might be safe this year. He attends the party and, sure enough, there is a gift under the tree for him.

Given what has happened in the past, Mr. Crum is acting a little sly this year. He is completely ignoring the present under the tree with his name on it. Instead, Mr. Crum is mingling with the crowd, waiting to see if anyone notices the present that has not yet been given to him. In all of his wisdom, he figures the person handing the present to him is likely to be the one responsible for placing it under the tree.

Oddly, of all people, Mr. O'Brien sees the undistributed present, picks it up, and takes a look at the tag. Noticing that the present is for Mr. Crum, the principal's best buddy hands the present to Mr. Crum. But, it's not likely that Mr. O'Brien is the one behind the mystery gifts over the years. Mr. O'Brien has also received a generous portion of similar prank gifts in the past.

Mr. Crum opens his present, finding a blue ribbon with a medal attached to it. This is not just any medal. It is a gold medal. Looking on the back, Mr. Crum sees an inscription that reads "Blood Type B-Negative". Mr. Crum wonders how anyone even knew his blood type, but he totally missed the pun that he is always being negative. Hanging the medal around his neck, Mr. Crum feels as if he has finally received a gift that he is deserving of. Taking a look at the medal, it looks very much like one of the beautifully crafted medals awarded to the track and cross country athletes during the regular season meets.

A closer look at Mr. Crum's medal reveals that it is, in fact, a track medal. The runner, depicted on the medal in high-relief, however, has been slightly modified. The upper body and legs have been ground off of the runner, leaving only the buttocks, or, as Braden would say, the ass. Appearing professionally done, the final product was polished to perfection. So, Mr. Crum is proudly wearing a medal with the depiction of an ass on it.

Mr. Zunde, clearly recognizing the type of medal that Mr. Crum is wearing, without getting too close, moves in to take a better look. Seeing the medal, Mr. Zunde walks over to Mr. Frazier, and mentions, "Crum's medal is a gold track medal from an indoor seasonal meet. Someone has modified it, removing everything but the runner's ass." Mr. Frazier, starting to laugh, replies, "are you serious?" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "yes, I'm afraid I am. Walk by and take a look for yourself."

Mr. Frazier walks by Mr. Crum, glancing at the medal as he passes. Unable to contain his laughter, Mr. Frazier turns away from Mr. Crum, and pretends to choke on a cookie for a second. Walking back to Mr. Zunde, Mr. Frazier tells him, "I would really like to know who is behind these gifts. This is the best one yet!" Mr. Zunde informs Mr. Frazier, "I have no idea, but I'll give you one guess who the prime suspects are going to be." It will be no secret that Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde are at the top of the list.

Miss Amherst and Miss Starr, seeing that Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier are having way too much fun, walk over to see what's up. Miss Amherst asks, "what are you guys up to now?" Mr. Zunde tells Miss Amherst and Miss Starr, "walk over, and take a close look at Mr. Crum's medal." Miss Amherst whispers to Miss Starr, "this has got to be good. I can feel it." Miss Starr and Miss Amherst walk by Mr. Crum, glancing over at the medal. Both of them burst out laughing, and have to excuse themselves, leaving the teacher's lounge. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, seeing Miss Amherst and Miss Starr walk out of the lounge, follow them.

In the hallway, Miss Amherst, who cannot stop laughing, asks Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, "okay, which one of you guys are behind this?" Mr. Zunde replies, "it's not me. But, I'd really like to know who it is. Whoever made that medal deserves their own award." Mr. Frazier adds, "and, it's not me either." For a while, they discuss who it might be, but come up with no good answers. Miss Starr mentions, "whoever it is, must be well versed in Mr. Crum's run ins with the track team and the other sports teams." Mr. Zunde comments, "and, whoever it is, I suspect they are in the lounge right now." The four teachers head back into the teachers' lounge, wondering who the mystery Santa is.

Apparently, while the teachers stepped out into the hallway for a moment, Mr. Crum was made aware of the fine intricate details of the medal he was wearing. An irate Mr. Crum approaches the group of four teachers and, showing Mr. Frazier the medal, angrily asks, "Mr. Frazier, do you know anything about this?" Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, Miss Amherst, and Miss Starr all take a good look at the medal. Miss Amherst and Miss Starr break out in laughter again, as Mr. Frazier replies, "it looks like a special award medal to me. I can't say that we've ever given one out like this before."

Mr. Crum brazenly asks Mr. Zunde, "how about you? Do you know anything about this?" Mr. Zunde, taking a good look, replies, "well, if there was a foot on the medal about to kick that ass, I would suspect Braden. But, he's graduated. So, it must have been Mr. O'Brien." In a demanding tone, Mr. Crum brashly asks, "why Mr. O'Brien?" Mr. Zunde replies, "it looks like a self portrait. And, a very good one at that." Mr. Crum, getting more irate, replies, "I can see that I'm not going to get anywhere here."

Mr. Chubin, Miss Hamilton, and Miss Paterno, the other gym teachers, hearing the commotion over the medal, all come over to see what is going on. Mr. Zunde asks the three other gym teachers, "would any of you know who is behind Mr. Crum's award?" It was no mistake that Mr. Zunde called Mr. Crum's present an award. Throwing Mr. Crum under the bus, Mr. Zunde instructs Mr. Crum, "show them your medal, please. Maybe they'll know who's behind it." Seeing the medal, Miss Hamilton and Miss Paterno both start cracking up, causing Miss Starr and Miss Amherst to again join in. Mr. Chubin comments, "wow! Nice work! Well, I can tell you for sure that it's not a cross country medal. Our medals don't quite look like that."

Mr. Crum, calling the physical education staff together, asks Mr. Frazier the stupid question, "are all of the track medals accounted for?" Mr. Frazier replies, "I have no idea. We've handed out hundreds of these medals over the years. It's not like I can keep track of every last medal." Mr. Crum then asks Mr. Chubin, "how about the cross country medals? Are they all accounted for?" Mr. Chubin replies, "I suppose they are. But, I have no idea what happens to them once they are given out. And, what if their not?" Miss Hamilton volunteers, "I can assure you that it's not a swimming medal." Mr. Crum hits yet another dead-end street, and is not the least bit happy.

Mr. Crum exclaims, "someone must know something! I'm going to get to the bottom of this." Miss Paterno comments, "if you want to get to the bottom of this, the bottom is right there on the medal." Mr. Crum asks Miss Paterno, "do you have anything to do with this?" Miss Paterno replies, "no. But suppose I did? Then what?" After a long pause, Mr. Crum replies, "I don't have to answer your questions."

Ending the interrogation, Mr. Zunde informs Mr. Crum, "and, none of us have to answer yours. So, have a merry Christmas and a happy New Year." The physical education staff disperses, mingling with the rest of the crowd, quickly finding out that there is only one subject of conversation in the room - Mr. Crum's Christmas present.

After the party, Mr. Frazier heads back to the physical education office before he heads home. He distinctly remembers there are two medals that were earned, but never distributed. Two years ago, Eddie had to leave an indoor meet before the awards ceremony in order to take his motorcycle lessons, which were held on Saturday afternoon. During that meet, Eddie earned a gold medal in the 40-yard dash and a gold medal in the 4 by 440 relay. Eddie left that meet immediately after the 4 by 440 relay, and never received the medals he earned. Mr. Frazier, looking around the office, finds Eddie's gold medal for the 4 by 440 relay in his desk drawer, but cannot find Eddie's gold medal for the 40-yard dash. Mr. Frazier now strongly suspects it is a teacher, not a student, making Mr. Crum's Christmas memorable each year.

On their way out, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Zunde, “do they have the equipment to modify a medal like that in the machine shop?” Mr. Zunde replies, “I’m sure they do. Mr. Crum’s medal could have been modified with any precision grinding tool. But, it was polished to perfection. I’m no expert, but I suspect that it would require something like jewelry-making equipment.” Mr. Frazier comments, “so, this is likely done by someone who has access to the athletic office and can use machining equipment, and has jewelry making equipment.” Mr. Zunde suggests, “there could be more than one person involved.” Mr. Frazier exclaims, “well, if they want more medals, I can keep them coming!” Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde head home, having a good laugh on their way out.

With the Autumn semester coming to a close, everyone is ready for Christmas break. On the last day of the semester, Erika walks to school, as she has been doing most days during this school year. Approaching the schoolyard, Erika is promptly greeted by three thugs who storm out from behind the bushes, attacking Erika from behind. One of them quickly places her in a choke hold, while another grabs her right arm. The third one rapidly proceeds to deliver blow after blow to Erika’s mid section.

Erika quickly head butts the person who has her in a choke hold. That person is quickly incapacitated, falling to the ground with a river of blood coming from her broken nose. A river of tears soon accompanies the river of blood. With one person put out of commission, Erika quickly grabs the arm of the person restraining her, and tosses her in front of a school bus that is moving slowly toward the drop-off point. Colliding with the bus, the second person is also quickly taken out of action.

The bus driver radios the dispatch office, advising them of what just happened, and then goes to aid the person who collided with the bus. A few students run inside to find a teacher, since a fight just broke out. John and Hoffer, who were sitting on the front lawn, go to find Mr. Zunde or Mr. Frazier. They figure that Erika can take care of herself.

On to number three, Erika chases Terry Haynes for a few feet, taking her down hard on the concrete walkway. Erika pounds Haynes’ face into the concrete a few times then, apparently learning the technique from Braden and Eddie, twists Haynes shoulder into a position that it was never intended to move. The proverbial crack is heard, and Haynes lets out a loud scream. Erika turns Haynes over and, as she has done a few times before, delivers blow after blow to Haynes, both hard and at will. Haynes, just like her two cohorts, has absolutely no defense against Erika.

A few other track team members, who were hanging out with John and Hoffer, head over to watch the fight. If necessary, one of them could step in and stop the fight. But, if Erika is winning, why bother. To get involved

might invite the opportunity to get suspended by Mr. Crum. More students gather around to watch the fight, and the crowd grows quite large.

Trying to get through the crowd is Mr. Crum. Finally getting to the action, Mr. Crum yells out, "you two! Stop fighting! Break it up! Break it up!" Ignoring the principal, Erika raises Haynes off the ground, holding her by her dislocated arm. Haynes dare not move, for if Erika pulls on that arm, Haynes will be in excruciating pain. Momentarily letting Haynes go, Erika solidly connects with Haynes' jaw, sending her to the ground again. Erika then forcefully kicks Haynes in the ass, finishing her off for now. Haynes lets out a loud scream, and lies on the ground, crying. Now that the job is finished, Erika walks away to pick up her notebook that fell to the ground earlier.

As if that were not enough for Erika to deal with in the morning, someone then forcefully grabs Erika's arm from behind. Erika quickly back kicks the perpetrator, who lets out a loud scream as he is propelled on his way to a surprise meeting with the concrete. Turning around, Erika sees Mr. Crum laying on the ground, and the crowd goes silent. From the ground, Mr. Crum yells out with a voice one octave higher than normal, "all of you, get in my office, now!" Erika ignores Mr. Crum, and goes to pick up her notebook.

Mr. Zunde, who arrived just before Mr. Crum grabbed Erika's arm, tells Mr. Frazier, "I can't wait to hear this one. It's probably going to take the whole day." Mr. Frazier replies, "well, it's the last day of this semester anyway. It's not like anything else is going to get done around here today." Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier already got the play by play from John and Hoffer, who both saw how the altercation began. Mr. Zunde is quite confident that Mr. Crum, again, doesn't have a leg to stand on.

Walking by Mr. Crum, who is still laying on the ground, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier walk over to Erika to find out exactly what happened. Mr. Zunde asks Erika, "are you okay?" Erika replies, "I will be. But, I'm not in the mood for listening to that asshole laying on the ground right now."

Mr. Zunde asks Erika, "what exactly happened?" Erika explains, "I was walking up the walk, and those three assholes jumped me. They all came up from behind, and one of them put me in a choke hold, and another one grabbed my arm. Then, the bitchkrieg started to punch me. So, I head butted the one behind me, and threw the other one off of me. Then, I kicked the shit out of the bitchkrieg." Mr. Zunde tells Erika, "it looks like you did a good job. From the looks of things, I'd say you won this fight. You'll get an A in gym class."

Mr. Frazier asks, “the bitchkrieg? What was her name again?” Erika replies, “Terry Haynes.” Mr. Zunde mentions, “I thought she graduated.” Erika replies, “she did.” Mr. Frazier comments, “I can’t wait to hear why she was on school grounds.” Mr. Zunde asks, “who are the other two?” Erika replies, “I don’t know. I don’t think I’ve ever seen them before.”

Interrupting the conversation, Mr. Crum yells out, “Erika! Get into my office right now!” Mr. Crum also tells Haynes to go to his office, but he apparently forgot that Haynes graduated. But, Haynes didn’t hear Mr. Crum. She’s laying on the ground, somewhat incapacitated at the moment. It’s not likely that Haynes is going anywhere soon.

Just then, a police car rolls up, which makes Erika feel a whole lot better. Dealing with the police sounds much better to Erika than dealing with an irate Mr. Crum. Seeing the police car, however, does not give Mr. Crum a warm, fuzzy feeling. Officer Richard Hayes gets out of his patrol car, who has been called to the school many times before, and is met by the bus driver. The bus dispatcher had called the police, since there was a pedestrian hit by the school bus. Seeing the commotion, Officer Hayes sees that he is walking into a bit more than he expected this morning.

Officer Hayes begins his investigation by getting a brief statement from the bus driver. The bus driver explains that Erika threw the girl out into the lane, and he could not stop in time. As Officer Hayes is interrogating the bus driver, his partner is questioning the girl struck by the bus. The girl struck by the bus explains that Erika threw her in front of the bus. Meanwhile, Mr. Crum is still yelling at Erika, who purposely ignores him. As the officer is trying to sort out this incident, the girl struck by the bus, whose name is Dana, is told by the officer to stand against the wall, along with the bus driver.

Officer Hayes then comes to Erika, who is still being yelled at by Mr. Crum. Mr. Crum interrupts the officer, exclaiming, “I’m the principal of this school! I need to see Erika in my office right now!” Officer Hayes bluntly tells Mr. Crum, “I’m sorry, but it will have to wait. In the mean time, I suggest that you just calm down, sir.” Instead of calming down, Mr. Crum paces back and forth, contemplating his next authoritative move.

Officer Hayes gets Erika’s statement, which includes both that she was assaulted by the three girls, and then again by Mr. Crum, who grabbed her by the arm. Erika is told to stand against the wall, along with the bus driver and Dana. Officer Hayes then radios the dispatcher, alerting them of the situation and that he will be out of service for more time than was originally anticipated.

Officer Hayes then speaks with Terry Haynes, as his partner speaks with the girl who put Erika into a choke hold. Within a few minutes, Haynes, and the girl who put Erika into a choke hold, whose name is Donna, are up against the wall with the rest of the group. They are all now detained by his partner as officer Hayes begins to interrogate Mr. Crum. As the questioning of the school's principal begins, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier move a little closer to get a good seat.

Officer Hayes asks Mr. Crum, "okay, explain to me what happened from your perspective." Mr. Crum exclaims, "they were fighting in school! I'm trying to get them into my office so I can get to the bottom of this!" Officer Hayes tells Mr. Crum, "let me back up. Let's start with this. Erika Gabriel alleges that you grabbed her by the arm. Did you, in fact, grab Erika Gabriel by the arm?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "I'm the principal of this school! I had to stop the fight!" Officer Hayes rewords his question, explaining to Mr. Crum, "the answer to my question is either 'yes' or 'no'. So, let me ask one more time. Did you grab Erika Gabriel by her arm?" Mr. Crum again avoids the question, yelling, "they were fighting in school!"

Officer Hayes understands that this will take a lot to sort out, and Mr. Crum is clearly being uncooperative. Mr. Crum, with his combative attitude, is told to stand against the wall, along with the others.

Mr. Crum, however, refuses, telling Officer Hayes, "I'm not standing against the wall. I'm the principal of this school!" Officer Hayes explains, "first of all, I don't care who you are. I have a lot to sort out here. I strongly suggest that you obey my order and stand along the wall with the others until I finish my preliminary investigation." Mr. Crum refuses, telling the officer, "I'm not standing against the wall!" Officer Hayes, having enough of Mr. Crum, places the principal in handcuffs, and escorts him to the wall where his partner will supervise his detention.

Recognizing Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, Officer Hayes approaches them and explains, "we've spoken to a half dozen characters and gotten a half dozen stories. Do either of you know what is going on here?" Mr. Zunde replies, "John Bogenskaya and Jimmy Hoffer saw what happened and how it started. They came to get us after the fight broke out." Officer Hayes asks Mr. Zunde, "are those two here now?" Mr. Zunde replies, "yes," and then yells out, "hey! John and Jimmy! Please come over here." John and Hoffer walk over, as Mr. Zunde explains to Officer Hayes, "when I arrived, Mr. Crum, our illustrious principal, grabbed Erika from behind by her arm. She then back kicked him, and he fell to the ground. I suppose he's a little upset that he got beat up by a girl." Officer Hayes replies, "from the looks of Erika these days, this Crum character should be worried."

Officer Hayes instructs John and Hoffer to stand along the wall with the others. Officer Hayes asks Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, "is there anyone else that you are aware of who may be key witnesses?" Mr. Frazier replies, "there must have been a hundred students around. Everyone was just getting to school. Whenever a fight breaks out, everyone stands around to watch." Knowing that this is going to be a long morning, Officer Hayes tells Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, "well, let's all go inside and sort this out." Mr. Zunde tells Officer Hayes, "if you'd like, you can use the auxiliary gym. No one is likely to interrupt you there." Officer Hayes replies, "thanks. I think I'll take you up on that."

Officer Hayes tells his partner, "we're all going inside to sort this out." Addressing the group against the wall, Officer Hayes announces, "everyone, please follow me, single file." Everyone is escorted into the school, led by Officer Hayes and Mr. Zunde, with the other officer following behind the group. As Mr. Zunde leads them to the auxiliary gym, Mr. Crum exclaims, "where are we going?" Mr. Crum is ignored, raising his blood pressure a few points. On the way in, John mentions to Hoffer, "at least we get out of going to class today." Hoffer replies, "yeah. And, he can't suspend us. We didn't do anything."

Arriving at the auxiliary gym, Officer Hayes assigns everyone a place to sit on the bleachers, keeping those involved in the fight well separated. Addressing the group, the officer announces, "we have gotten preliminary statements from most of you. My partner and I are going to speak to each of you individually, and take your statements. We will then decide on what action, if any, will be taken." Officer Hayes already has a clear idea of what is going on. He, and his partner, will be questioning those involved to document the case. And, for the time being, Officer Hayes is nice enough to remove the handcuffs from Mr. Crum's wrists, warning him not to leave the gym.

As Officer Hayes gets the statement of John, and his partner gets the statement of Hoffer, Captain Gabriel enters the gym, carefully looking over the group seated on the bleachers. Mr. Zunde, standing off to the side with Mr. Frazier, whispers to Mr. Frazier, "here it comes. Erika's father looks like he's ready to put the hammer down." Captain Gabriel walks over to Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, and points at Erika, signaling for her to join them. Mr. Crum, catching a glimpse of Captain Gabriel, becomes worried, and starts sweating.

Captain Gabriel asks Erika, "what's going on today?" Erika explains to her father in detail what happened. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier add what John and Hoffer relayed to them. And finally, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier explain what they saw as they walked up. After hearing Erika's, Mr. Zunde's, and Mr. Frazier's account of the situation, and examining the

perpetrators and witnesses sitting on the bleachers, Captain Gabriel is confident that this will be quite easy to sort out.

Officer Hayes moves on to taking Erika's statement, as his partner takes the statement of Terry Haynes. Erika is accompanied by her father, who tells Officer Hayes, "just seeing who is on the bleachers, I think I already have this one figured out." Officer Hayes, seeing Dana and Donna, the Harmon sisters, sitting on the bleachers, replies, "I agree. This shouldn't be too hard. And, there's a warrant out for Donna Harmon's arrest. So, we already know where she's headed." Captain Gabriel walks back to join Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, where the discussion centers upon the upcoming track season.

Mr. Zunde excuses himself for a moment, and leaves the gym, as Captain Gabriel, Mr. Frazier, and Erika continue talking about track. Seeing Mr. Zunde leave the gym, Mr. Crum appoints himself in charge, stands up, and proceeds to leave the gym as well. Officer Hayes yells out, "hey! Please take your seat. I haven't told you that you can leave yet." Mr. Crum, knowing that he outranks Mr. Zunde, exclaims, "I'm the principal! I have work to do."

Captain Gabriel walks over to Mr. Crum, telling him, "I advise you, sir, that you take a seat, as you were instructed." Mr. Crum brazenly replies, "and, if I don't?" Captain Gabriel calmly replies, "to start with, I'll arrest you." Mr. Crum, referring to Mr. Zunde, exclaims, "then, why was he allowed to leave?" Captain Gabriel replies, "he's not being detained. You, however, are. Now, please take your seat." Mr. Crum finally relents, and takes a seat, as John and Hoffer laugh at their school's principal.

The interrogations continue, as Mr. Zunde returns with a copy of Mr. Crum's official school policy manual. Mr. Zunde shows section five of the policy manual to Mr. Frazier and Captain Gabriel. Mr. Zunde points out that the entire section in the manual only refers to physical altercations between students. Mr. Zunde is quick to explain that the policy manual does not make any reference to physical altercations between a student and someone who is not enrolled in school. Since the Harmon sisters and Haynes are not enrolled in the school, Mr. Crum has absolutely no case against Erika, nor any authority in this situation. Mr. Frazier comments, "that's good to know."

Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Zunde, "how did you know about that?" Mr. Zunde explains, "after I found the rule where disciplinary action is the sole responsibility of the head coach for physical altercations occurring on the sports field, I read the manual from cover to cover. I wanted to see what else I might find of interest." Mr. Frazier asks, "did you find anything else interesting?" Mr. Zunde replies, "yes. The policy manual only refers to physical altercations between students. If a student were to have a fight

with a faculty member, there is no policy regarding that issue.” Mr. Frazier laughs, now knowing a significant loophole in the school’s policy manual.

Mr. Zunde adds, “but, this is very important. Since the first meet is in early January, Mr. Crum would be sure to carefully time suspending Erika to keep her out of the meet.” Mr. Frazier replies, “his timing does seem to be impeccable.” Mr. Zunde has Erika’s defense already prepared should she get called to Mr. Crum’s office in January.

Right before the first lunch period, Officer Hayes and his partner have completed their investigation into the events leading up to the fight before school this morning. Walking over to Captain Gabriel, the officers discuss the results of the investigation, as Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier have a seat on the bleachers. Officer Hayes outlines what action he recommends, obtaining the approval of his supervisor, Captain Gabriel.

Standing in front of the group, Officer Hayes announces, “the following people are free to leave. John Bogenskaya, James Hoffer, Erika Gabriel, Russell Dilbeck, George Frazier, and Gerhard Zunde.” Mr. Dilbeck, the bus driver, is not being charged with hitting a pedestrian, as it is unclear whether the bus hit Dana Harmon or whether she was thrown into the bus. The evidence clearly seems to suggest that Dana was thrown into a moving vehicle. John and Hoffer leave, along with Mr. Dilbeck. Erika, however, takes a seat next to Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, who decide to stay a while and watch the entertainment.

Approaching the three perpetrators, Officer Hayes announces, “Theresa Haynes, you are under arrest for assaulting Erika Gabriel.” Haynes is read her rights. Dana and Donna Harmon are also placed under arrest, and read their rights. With another outstanding charge, Donna Harmon is also arrested for shoplifting. A warrant was already out for her arrest for that particular crime. The Harmon sisters apparently have a rap sheet that makes Chuckie and Andrew Goldstein look like saints.

Watching as the arrests are made, even more sweat begins to fall down the face of Mr. Crum. Mr. Crum can clearly see that anyone who has been told that they can leave is not being charged with a crime. Mr. Crum also can see that those who were not released are being arrested. Great fear comes over Mr. Crum, who starts shaking, as he sees the three girls placed in handcuffs, sitting on the bleachers and weeping.

Greater fear comes over Mr. Crum as Officer Hayes and his partner approach the school’s principal. Mr. Crum, wanting to get out of this situation as fast as possible, brashly asks, “are we done here?” Officer Hayes replies, “not quite.” Those were not exactly the words Mr. Crum wanted to hear. A little farther over on the bleachers, the conversation

between Mr. Zunde, Mr. Frazier, and Erika quiets down a bit, as they listen in to hear the fate of Mr. Crum.

Officer Hayes explains to Mr. Crum, “Maurice Crum, you are quite fortunate today. Erika Gabriel has, for now, decided not to press assault charges against you.” Mr. Crum exclaims, “I didn’t assault Erika Gabriel!” Officer Hayes explains, “hold on, sir. Calm down. When you grabbed her by her arm, that is considered assault. Four witnesses clearly saw that, when you grabbed her arm, the altercation was well over with. If the altercation were still in progress, you may have justification for your action but, as it stands, you do not. Other options, other than physical force, were available to you. It would have been wise of you to exhaust those options before resorting to physical force.”

Still maintaining his combative attitude, Mr. Crum asks Officer Hayes, “how about Erika? Look at what she did!” Officer Hayes explains, “it seems that I’ve explained this to you once before, sometime last year. Erika Gabriel was assaulted. Anything that immediately follows an assault is considered justifiable self defense, especially in this case, where it was three on one.” Mr. Crum exclaims, “she kicked me!” Reiterating himself, Officer Hayes again explains, “as I said, anything that immediately follows an assault is considered justifiable self defense. In other words, you started it. What happens to you afterwards would be your problem.”

Mr. Crum, continuing to inflict the officer with nonsense, tells him, “I simply cannot allow fighting in school! We have rules!” Finally, Officer Hayes explains, “well, sir, the law does allow the use of physical force under certain circumstances. Self defense is one of those cases. The law just happens to trump your school policy and your rules. So, get used to it.”

Hearing Officer Hayes lecture Mr. Crum, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, “I’m glad I stayed for the finale. This is quite entertaining.” Mr. Frazier replies, “me too. And, I’m just glad we’re not the ones having to set him straight this time.” For some reason, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier enjoy watching Mr. Crum backed into a corner with no escape.

Officer Hayes continues, telling Mr. Crum, “we’ll take this from here. I suggest, in the mean time, that you spend your time tracking down overdue library books, sending late students to detention, monitoring the restrooms, and that sort of thing. Let us do the real work.” Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier laugh, having heard a similar statement from Officer Hayes three years ago during an incident with Paul Mahoney.

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde wish Erika and Captain Gabriel a merry Christmas, which seems to irritate Mr. Crum. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier then head to lunch. Erika hangs around, speaking with her father for a

few minutes, then goes to lunch. Officer Hayes, and his partner, escort Terry Haynes and the Harmon sisters out to the police car. The three of them will be transported to the police station where they will be booked. After that, Haynes and her cohorts will be transported to the hospital. Mr. Crum heads back to his office, and should be glad that he has not been arrested. But, he is not. Mr. Crum should also be appreciative of the fact that no more of his office furniture has been destroyed. But, again, he is not.

Cornered by Mr. Zunde at every turn, Mr. Crum never really learned his lesson. After the incident with Eddie dropping out of school last year, Dr. Brooks has made it very clear that Mr. Crum has absolutely no authority over sports and the physical education department. Resulting from the superintendent's decree, Mr. Crum has resorted to putting athletes under the microscope while school is in session where he still has some degree of authority.

With the semester coming to an end, the track team is ready for their first meet. There's no doubt that Mr. Crum will be back again in the Winter during the indoor track season to suspend, or send to detention, any athlete he can. But, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier are always one step ahead of Mr. Crum. For the short term, Mr. Crum will be relegated to searching for overdue library books and students who are late for class.