

Eddie, The Collegiate Junior

Chapter Three Christmas Break

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Now that the semester is over, the University's track team gets a well-deserved break. But, Eddie still has to go to work at the service station. Mark and Bobby B. are putting the finishing touches on Dr. Akinmola's church building, hoping to get it ready by Christmas. And, since they don't have to go to classes, many of the team members get more training in over the break than during the semester.

On a Saturday morning, Officer Richard Hayes drives into the service station, as he periodically does. Seeing Officer Hayes, Eddie yells out, "hey, Richard! Are you all unpacked yet?" Richard replies, "we managed to get that done fairly quickly. I can't believe how much space we have now. Thank you again for getting the guys to help us move. Sandy still can't believe how fast you guys got everything over to the new house." Eddie replies, "no problem. We were glad to help."

Richard tells Eddie, "about this break in at the University, I'm sure you've heard from Officer Braden that there was a piece of paper with a phone number on it in this Todd McCutchen character's pocket." Eddie replies, "yeah. I remember him saying something about that during practice." Richard informs Eddie, "as it turns out, the phone number belongs to some character named Brad Evans. It traces back to a boarding house outside the city, about fifteen miles from here. Have you ever heard of this guy?" Eddie laughs, and tells Richard, "wow! Brad Evans. Barbara heard through the grapevine that Brad Evans is going to be the new Centerville track coach."

Richard asks, "so, what do you know about this Brad Evans character?" Eddie explains, "when I was in high school, he used to spy on our team, trying to figure out our workouts. Mr. Frazier caught him a few times watching the team while we were working out. And, for the last few years, he was working with Mr. Ruff, coaching Centerville." As he is taking some

notes, Richard comments, “Centerville. Ruff. And now, Evans. This gets deeper all the time. Something’s definitely going on here.” Eddie asks, “do you think there’s another gambling ring?” Richard replies, “it’s sure beginning to look that way. Or, it could be remnants of the old gambling ring getting back into business.” Eddie shares as much as he knows regarding Brad Evans with Richard, which is a lot more information that Richard ever expected.

As he is getting ready to leave, Richard mentions, “it’s December. I can’t believe how warm it is out.” Eddie replies, “yeah. Me, Kathy, Mark, and Paula are going to ride our bicycles to the beach after I get off work today. We need to get some training in.” Richard asks, “is the team as good as last year?” Eddie replies, “yeah. We think we can take all the gold medals at the divisional meet in January.” Richard tells Eddie, “I’m going to try to make it to that meet.” Richard then heads out, and Eddie gets back to work.

Later that day, Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula get on their bicycles and head to the beach. On their way, they pass by Officer Hayes’ new home, stopping to say hello to his wife, Sandy. Sandy, who is in the front yard planting Pansies in the flower bed, again thanks the moving crew for helping them move. Moving on toward the parkway, they all head down the paved path to the beach.

As they are about to pass by the portal, an arrow shot from a bow comes from the woods. Flying through the air, the arrow travels through the spokes of Paula’s bicycle, and is snapped in two by the spokes. Paula loses control of her bicycle, and goes down. Eddie quickly veers off the path, intending to chase down the guy with the bow whom he sees running through the woods. Kathy and Mark attend to Paula, who fortunately landed on the grass rather than the pavement.

On his pursuit, Eddie gets off his bicycle, and starts running after the clown with the bow. Easily catching him, Eddie places the jerk into an arm lock, and escorts him back to the group. The jerk yells out, “let me go!” Eddie replies, “no, junior. There’s a few people who want to kick your fat ass! And, I don’t want to miss it. And, for the record, junior, I don’t like bullies.” Eddie heads toward the group, who can now clearly see who the perpetrator is.

Eddie yells out, “look what I found!” Paula runs up, giving Chuckie multiple swift kicks in his thigh, repeatedly yelling, “you piece of shit!” Mark yells out to Chuckie, “this time, I’m kicking your ass, junior.” But, it will be a while before Mark gets his chance to kick Chuckie’s ass. Paula is still kicking Chuckie in every place imaginable on his body.

Eddie suggests to Mark, “why don’t we get rid of this problem once and for all?” Mark asks, “how are we going to do that?” Eddie points to the portal, as a big grin comes over Mark’s face. Seeing what Eddie is implying, Kathy tells Eddie, “tell me you’re not!” Mark exclaims, “oh, yeah! We are!”

Eddie tells Chuckie, “okay, junior! We’re going for a trip in my time machine.” Still maintaining Chuckie in an arm lock, Eddie places his hand over Chuckie’s eyes, as he drags him into the portal. Eddie tells Mark, “anywhere you want, bro.” Mark raises his right hand, and quietly commands the portal, “Hawaii, today.”

Eddie, Mark, and Chuckie arrive at the Hawaiian portal. Eddie guides Chuckie through the brush, and onto the road. After about 50 yards, Eddie removes his hands from Chuckie’s eyes, as they guide Chuckie to the end of the steep road. At the end of the road, Eddie releases Chuckie, telling him, “walk down the street, and keep walking, junior.” Chuckie, who is in shock, obeys Eddie’s command, and walks down the street. Eddie tells Mark, “let’s get out of here.” Eddie and Mark run up the road back to the portal, and enter in, leaving Chuckie in Hawaii with no foreseeable way of returning home.

Returning to their place, Eddie and Mark walk out of the portal without Chuckie. Kathy, who cannot believe what Eddie and Mark just did, exclaims, “what did you do to him?” Mark replies, “we dropped him off in Hawaii.” Hearing the news, Kathy and Paula start laughing hysterically. Mark walks over to Kathy and Paula, but Eddie turns around, and goes to retrieve his bicycle. Walking through the portal, Eddie sees a yellow stone among the rocks and picks it up. Eddie returns with his bicycle, finding out that Paula is okay, but her bicycle is not.

Paula tells Eddie, “a spoke broke on my front wheel.” Taking a look at Paula’s wheel, Eddie tells her, “I can remove the spoke, and true up the wheel. You’ll still be able to ride it. It will be okay for now. When we get home, I’ll replace the spoke.” Eddie gets to work on Paula’s bicycle, removing the broken spoke, and straightening up the wheel, which is slightly out of true, with his spoke wrench.

While Eddie is off to the side working on Paula’s bicycle, Paula tells everyone, “I’m going to Hawaii for a second.” Kathy asks, “why are you going there?” Paula replies, “I want to see that little twit wondering where he is.” Kathy tells Paula, “I’m coming with you!” Mark smiles, instructing Kathy and Paula, “I told the portal, ‘Hawaii, today.’” Kathy and Paula then enter the portal. Kathy raises her right hand and states, “Hawaii, today.” Kathy looks at Paula, and asks, “how are we still here?” Paula replies, “I don’t know. Let me try.” Paula raises her right hand and states, “Hawaii,

today.” Seeing that they are not in Hawaii, Kathy tells Paula, “that’s really weird.”

Kathy yells out, “hey, Eddie! The portal is broken!” Eddie walks over and asks, “what do you mean?” Kathy explains, “we told the portal to take us to Hawaii, today, and nothing happened.” Eddie tells Kathy, “let me try.” Eddie walks into the portal alone, raises his right hand, and states, “Hawaii, today.” Arriving in Hawaii, Eddie walks over to a pineapple plant, and removes the pineapple. Eddie reenters the portal, returning to his place. Eddie walks out from among the boulders with a pineapple, telling Kathy, “it works for me.”

Quite surprised that the portal worked for Eddie, Kathy asks, “how come it didn’t work for me and Paula?” With a sudden stroke of genius, Eddie exclaims, “I know why!” Kathy asks Eddie, “well?” Eddie reaches into his pocket, and pulls out the yellow stone he found earlier. Eddie explains, “I found this yellow stone in the portal. When the Chuckie was struggling, he scraped up the dirt, and exposed a yellow stone. So, I picked it up.” Eddie hands Kathy the yellow stone, and tells her, “go ahead, and try it again.”

Kathy and Paula reenter the portal with the yellow stone Eddie removed from the portal earlier. Kathy raises her right hand and gives the command, “Hawaii, today.” Kathy and Paula, as Eddie expected, arrive at the Hawaiian portal. Seeing Chuckie nowhere in sight, Kathy and Paula reenter the portal, returning to their place and time. Kathy and Paula walk out of the portal, and Kathy exclaims, “okay! That is so weird! It worked!”

Eddie speculates, “so, it’s the yellow stone that makes the portal work, not the boulders.” Kathy exclaims, “do you know what this means?” Mark asks, “what?” Kathy concludes, “the blue, yellow, and red stones are portable portals!” Kathy walks over to the portal, telling everyone, “maybe there are other stones here somewhere.” Kathy and Paula search for more stones around the boulders as Eddie finishes repairing Paula’s front wheel. Not finding any other stones among the rocks, Kathy is convinced of Eddie’s theory that the yellow stone is actually the portal.

While they are searching outside the portal for stones, Paula mentions, “you know, I bet there are no portals anywhere. I bet the stones will take us to anywhere we want to go.” Kathy replies, “you might be right about that. We’ve always gotten to wherever we told the portal to take us.” Paula observes, “yeah, and wherever we go, it seems like these three boulders appear there too.” Kathy mentions, “now, I’m guessing that, if I stand on a cement pad, and ask the portal to bring me somewhere, the same cement pad will show up there.” As they are

talking, outside the portal behind one of the boulders, sure enough, Paula finds a blue stone, and tells Kathy, "I found a blue stone!"

Finished repairing Paula's front wheel, Eddie yells out, "I'm done. Come over and give it a test ride." Paula walks over and, riding up the paved path, tries out her bicycle. Turning around, Paula yells out, "it rides great! Let's go to the beach!" Placing his pineapple among the three boulders, Eddie tells Kathy, "don't let me forget to get my pineapple on the way home." The group gets on their bicycles and heads to the beach. And, in the meantime, Chuckie tries to figure out how he got to Hawaii.

When they return home from the beach, the group heads to Eddie and Kathy's house, with Eddie's pineapple. Curious for a deeper understanding of the portal, they take a yellow stone, blue stone, and red stone to the back yard. Placing them on a table where the park bench and small garden are that Eddie installed when they first bought the house, they will try out each stone as a portal. Laying out a few spare travertine tiles in a triangular pattern farther away in the woods, they create a makeshift portal. Not knowing what to expect, Mark asks, "now what?" Eddie replies, "we see if it works."

Kathy grabs a yellow stone, and the group walks toward the portal. Entering the portal, Eddie raises his right hand, and announces, "take us to yesterday, same time, same place." They walk out of the portal noticing that everything looks about the same. Kathy asks, "well, I wonder if it worked." Eddie replies, "it did. Mark's and Paula's bicycles aren't leaning against the house." Kathy exclaims, "wow! Do you know what this means?" Paula replies, "yeah! You guys can build a portal in your back yard, and so can we!" They walk back into the triangular region bounded by the three travertine tiles, and return to their time and place. Walking over toward the house, they see Mark's and Paula's bicycles leaning against the wall.

Kathy announces, "I want to try something," and walks into the portal alone with a yellow stone. Kathy raises her right hand, and announces, "take me to the blue universe." Walking out of the portal, Kathy sees Eddie, Mark, and Paula still standing near the pool fence. Realizing that nothing happened, Kathy asks Eddie, "can you please get me the blue stone?" Kathy takes the blue stone, and hands Eddie the yellow stone.

Reentering the portal, Kathy raises her right hand again, and announces, "take me to the blue universe." Walking out of the portal, Kathy quickly realizes she is now in the parallel universe she entered once before with Paula. Looking at the pool area, none of her patio furniture is set out. The driveway has not been pressure washed as was hers. And, the park bench and small garden Eddie installed is nowhere to be found. To Kathy, the home looks deserted. Kathy concludes that, in this

universe, she and Eddie do not live here, for it appears as it did before she and Eddie bought the house in their universe. Walking back into the woods, the three travertine tiles suggest that the portal moves with the person entering it. Kathy reenters the portal, and is immediately transported back to her universe.

Kathy yells out, "it worked! Eddie, give me the red stone!" Paula announces, "I'm coming with you!" Reentering the portal with Paula, Kathy raises her right hand, and announces, "take us to the red universe." Walking out of the portal, Kathy quickly realizes she and Paula are not in their universe. Kathy tells Paula, "this isn't our universe. All my patio furniture isn't here, just like in the blue universe. And, my park bench is gone, too. It doesn't even look like anyone lives here." Paula replies, "I can see that!" Walking back into the woods among the three travertine tiles, Kathy and Paula are transported back to their universe.

Kathy exits the portal, and yells out to Eddie and Mark, "hey! There's a red universe too!" Mark asks, "what's in it?" Kathy replies, "what's not in it is the patio furniture and my park bench!" Mark mentions, "that's kind of weird." Paula comments, "so, there are three universes. The yellow universe, which is ours, the blue universe, and now a red universe." Kathy tells Paula, "it sure looks that way."

Now very curious, Kathy reenters the portal with the red stone and, raising her right hand, announces, "take me to the blue universe." Walking out from among the three travertine tiles, Kathy finds herself still in her universe. Mark comments, "well, that didn't work exactly as planned." Kathy replies, "I didn't think it would. I'm holding a red stone. I need a blue stone to get to the blue universe." Kathy discovers that, in order to get to the blue universe, you need a blue stone.

Paula puts her arms around Mark's neck, and tells him, "make us our own portal in our back yard. Please?" Mark replies, "sure. I can go down to the stone yard, and get a huge slab of granite or marble. I can have them cut it to spec, and put it in the back yard." Paula tells Mark, "you'd better put it in the front yard because, in the blue universe, we don't live in our house." Mark replies, "yeah, but you told me that the lot is empty there. And, I can always move it. But, I know exactly where I'm going to put it." Paula asks, "where's that?" Mark replies, "in the woods next to the driveway, to the left of the detached garage." Paula agrees, telling Mark, "that's a great place!"

The next day, Eddie rides his bicycle to the location of the portal off the paved path along the parkway. When he arrives, Eddie measures the distances and angles between the dark spots on the boulders, just as he did seven years ago. With the yellow stone no longer in the portal, Eddie finds that the distance from one dark spot to another is no longer exactly

ten feet, three-and-one-half inches. Measuring the angles, Eddie finds the angle between any two dark spots is no longer 52 to 53 degrees, but rather the expected 60 degrees. And, without the yellow stone in the portal, Eddie finds that the portal no longer works. Eddie rightly concludes the yellow stone somehow distorts time and space.

About a week later, during the week, Officer Richard Hayes drives into the service station. Walking into the service area, Officer Hayes yells out, "hey! What's up?" Eddie replies, "what's up?" Richard tells Eddie, "you're not going to believe this one." Eddie asks, "what happened? Did Brad Evans confess?" Richard laughs, and replies, "I wish it was that easy."

Richard explains, "this Kathryn Black character and her son, Charles, have filed a complaint against you and Mark." Now knowing exactly what this is about, Eddie laughs as he replies, "oh really? What did I do this time?" Richard explains, "this Charles Black character alleges that you and Mark put him in a time machine that transported all of you to Hawaii. He alleges that you and Mark dumped him off on a street in Hawaii, and left him there." Eddie asks, "when did I supposedly do this?" Richard replies, "ten days ago, on Saturday afternoon." Eddie thinks for a moment, then tells Richard, "ten days ago, on Saturday. Let me think. If I remember correctly, we rode our bicycles to the beach that day." Richard replies, "I remember you telling me that."

Eddie laughs, and tells Richard, "it sounds like the Chuckie has been smoking way too much dope." Richard explains, "down at the station, the investigating officer was acting real serious, and trying not to laugh. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. According to the complaint, it took his parents four days to get him home." Wondering where this is going, Eddie asks, "so, what is the Chuckie going to do about it?" Richard tells Eddie, "he wants to press charges. The investigating officer finally had to tell those two crackpots that there is no law against putting someone in a time machine and transporting them to Hawaii. I hear this Charles Black and his mother were madder than a herd of stampeding bulls. But, nothing will ever come of it."

Acting somewhat disappointed, Eddie tells Richard, "that's just too bad. I can just imagine this one in court. 'Edward Bogenskaya, did you, in fact, put Charles Black into a time machine and transport him to Hawaii?' 'Your Honor, do I really have to answer these nonsensical questions.' 'Yes, you do. Please answer the question.' 'Yes, I put the Chuckie into a time machine, and sent him to Hawaii. And, if you put me in jail, I'm going to take out my ray gun and disintegrate all of you.' How stupid is that going to sound?"

Richard laughs, and tells Eddie, "they won't get anywhere with their complaint, but I thought I'd just let you know." Eddie tells Richard, "that's

just too bad. Now, I really want my day in court.” Richard informs Eddie, “if a case like that ever went to court, there would be standing room only. It would be a comedy show.” Eddie then tells Richard, “by the way, my time machine is broken down. It needs a new Johnson Rod. So, it couldn’t have possibly been me.” Richard laughs, and tells Eddie, “well, I’d better get back on the road.” Eddie also gets back to work, wondering when Mrs. Black will return to the service station to yell at him.

While Eddie is at work, Eddie’s father, Mark’s father, and Mark are finishing up Dr. Akinmola’s church building. With Erika and Bobby B. both helping, the project is coming along slightly ahead of schedule.

Chuckie is now in drug rehab and seeing a psychiatrist. Chuckie’s psychiatrist is intrigued by Chuckie’s insistence that Eddie and Mark put him in a time machine, and transported him to Hawaii.

Todd McCutchen, who was babbling nonsense when Officers Braden and Levy brought him in, was transported to the county hospital, where he was screened for drug usage. Todd McCutchen then ended up in the county jail, along with his brother, and were bailed out a few days later. Failing to show up for his final exams at the University, Jeff McCutchen has received a grade of incomplete in all of his classes.

A few days before Christmas, while Eddie is at work, Kathy’s counterpart from the blue parallel universe rides her bicycle up Eddie and Kathy’s driveway along with Paula’s counterpart. Wondering if anyone is home, Kathy’s and Paula’s counterparts decide that Paula’s counterpart should be the one to knock on the door. If Kathy’s counterpart knocked on the door, and someone else was inside with Kathy, everyone, especially Kathy, would have a lot of explaining to do.

Paula’s counterpart knocks on the door, wondering if Kathy is even home. Kathy opens the door and, thinking Paula’s counterpart is Paula, tells her, “oh, hey. I thought you and Mark were going out shopping.” Paula’s counterpart tells Kathy, “I came from the parallel universe. Kathy came with me. She’s by the garage. Is it safe?” Kathy replies, “wow! Yeah! Go get her and come on in.” Paula’s counterpart waves to Kathy’s counterpart, and they all head inside.

Kathy exclaims, “so, you guys came from the parallel universe?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah!” Seeing her counterpart’s necklace, Kathy mentions, “I should have known that. I don’t have a necklace with a yellow stone.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “but, you might someday. And, we found more blue and yellow stones!” Kathy replies, “awesome! And, guess what?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “tell me.” Kathy explains, “there are red stones, too, which take you to even another parallel

universe!” Kathy explains to her’s and Paula’s counterparts that nine red stones can be found together in one place, and exactly where they are.

Kathy then exclaims, “oh! And, you’ll never believe this. The blue, yellow, and red stones are what makes the portal work, not the three boulders.” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “really? How is that?” Kathy explains in detail to hers and Paula’s counterpart all about how she, Eddie, Mark, and Paula made the discovery. With three parallel universes, Kathy’s and Paula’s counterparts, from the blue universe, and Kathy, from the yellow universe, agree that, if they come to another universe, they will wear the color shirt of their universe. After all, with three parallel universes, it could be hard to keep them straight.

Kathy’s counterpart then tells Kathy, “you’ll never guess what I did!” Kathy replies, asking, “you made a million dollars?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah! Almost. I made five million dollars! How did you know? And, me and Eddie bought the land across the street from the high school, and we’re going to give it to Dr. Akinmola so he can build a church!” Paula’s counterpart observes, “it sounds like the blue and yellow universes are coming into alignment.”

Paula’s counterpart’s comment prompts Kathy to ask, “how about Mr. Crum? Did they bust him yet?” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “oh, yeah! It was right after school started. When they took him in, Mr. Frazier was so happy!” Kathy then informs hers and Paula’s counterpart, “this now makes a whole lot of sense. In my universe, Eddie graduated high school and, the next year, Eddie worked with the high school track team with me. So, Mr. Crum and Eddie got into a fight, and Officer Hayes came out to the school. And, Eddie casually mentioned to Officer Hayes that Mr. Crum lives on Second Street. So, in my universe, that led to Mr. Crum getting busted. And, in your universe, that never happened. Well, until now.”

Wondering what happened, Kathy’s counterpart asks Kathy, “Eddie and Mr. Crum got into a fight? What happened?” Kathy explains, “yeah. Mr. Crum was pulling his usual shit, so Eddie called him a pepocita head. Mr. Crum got mad, and put Eddie into a choke hold. So, Eddie body slammed Mr. Crum onto the ground. Then, when he came back to life, Mr. Crum went inside and called the police. So, the police came out and, when Eddie was talking to Officer Hayes, he mentioned that Mr. Crum lives on Second Street. It wasn’t too long after that they busted him.” Kathy’s counterpart concludes, “so, since my Eddie never graduated from high school, a lot of things never happened.” Paula’s counterpart replies, “but, they’re beginning to happen now!”

Kathy then mentions, “I haven’t really explored the red universe yet. I wonder where I live in that universe.” Kathy’s counterpart mentions, “I wonder if she lives here.” Kathy explains, “she doesn’t. When we set up

the portal in the back yard, and I went to the red universe, my patio furniture wasn't by the pool, and my park bench and table that Eddie put in weren't there either. So, she probably lives somewhere else." Kathy's counterpart mentions, "we'll have to find her." Paula's counterpart asks, "I wonder where I am in the red universe." Kathy's counterpart replies, "the way things are going, down the street from the red-universe Kathy, wherever that is."

After an interesting morning, Kathy's and Paula's counterparts get ready to head back to their universe. They mention to Kathy that, when they get back, they are going to look for the red stones. Kathy tells her's and Paula's counterpart to check out Dr. Akinmola's church building on the way back. Kathy also tells them to be careful, since Mark, Bobby B., and Erika are likely working on the property right now. Kathy's and Paula's counterparts from the blue universe wave goodbye, as Kathy wonders where her counterpart in the red universe is living.

A few days before Christmas, while Eddie is at work, an all too familiar face drives into the service station. Jimmy O'Brien, driving his old broken-down AMC Gremlin, pulls up to the pumps, and waits for Eddie to come out and wait on him. O'Brien, for some reason, likes to see Eddie filling his gas tank and cleaning his windshield. Seeing who is behind the wheel, Eddie takes a break and goes out to the pumps, hoping for some free entertainment.

Walking up to O'Brien, who is sitting in his car, Eddie asks, "fill it up?" O'Brien replies, "yeah. And, can you check the oil?" Eddie replies, "sure. No problem." Eddie suspects O'Brien's engine is low on oil, since a good amount of oil is being burned due to worn piston rings and valve guides, and coming out of the exhaust pipe. And, every time O'Brien comes in to get his tank filled, there is a puddle of oil under his car when he leaves. Eddie starts filling O'Brien's tank, and proceeds to check the oil.

Eddie opens the hood, and sees an engine that has been neglected for quite some time. Checking the oil, Eddie tells O'Brien, "you're down at least two quarts. There's nothing on your dipstick." O'Brien tells Eddie, "at the other service station, they told me that my dipstick is too short, and that it doesn't reach the oil." Eddie laughs to himself, and asks, "who told you that?" O'Brien replies, "the guy on the other side of town." Eddie asks, "Jake?" O'Brien replies, "yeah. That's the guy." Knowing that Jake was messing with O'Brien, Eddie explains, "it could also be that your oil is too thick, like molasses, and it's all sitting up in your cylinder head. But, either way, you need at least two quarts." O'Brien tells Eddie, "okay. Put it in for me." Eddie replies, "sure," knowing that adding a quart or two of oil is far below O'Brien's competence level.

O'Brien pays for his gas and two quarts of oil, and asks Eddie, "hey, can you check out my headlights?" Eddie asks, "what's wrong with them?" O'Brien replies, "they're dim, and sometimes they flicker." Eddie stands in front of O'Brien's vehicle, and tells O'Brien, "turn on your headlights." Eddie observes that one headlight is dim, and the other headlight is so poorly aimed that it cannot possibly shine on the road. Eddie tells O'Brien, "turn on the high beams." Eddie notices both headlights flicker, which is not good news.

Giving O'Brien the bad news, Eddie explains, "your electrical system definitely has a problem. It could be the headlight switch. It could be the headlight relay. It could be the wiring. Or, it could be all of the above. And, by the way, your battery is all corroded. You really should have it replaced." As expected, O'Brien asks, "how much will it cost to fix?" Eddie gives O'Brien a range of what it would likely cost, and asks, "do you want us to take a look at it?" O'Brien asks, "that's too expensive. Is there a cheaper way to fix it?" Eddie replies, "yeah. You can relabel your headlight switch to read 'off - dim - flicker'. Or, you can ask Santa Claus for a new car."

Knowing that his car has a considerable number of problems, O'Brien asks Eddie, "by the way, how much is a brake job?" Eddie replies, "it depends on what's wrong with them. What's it doing?" O'Brien replies, "it's not stopping too good." Wondering why O'Brien is so full of questions today, Eddie replies, "that's definitely not good. Did you want me to take a look at it?" O'Brien replies, "not today. I have to get to work." Eddie tells O'Brien, "that's okay. If the brakes won't stop the car, something else eventually will stop it."

O'Brien, as dumb as he is, now realizes that Eddie is messing with him. O'Brien tells Eddie, "I think I'll get that other guy to look at it." Eddie replies, "no problem. Go ahead." Eddie is sure that Jake will have a few unique and interesting solutions to O'Brien's automotive problems. O'Brien gets back in his car, and Eddie wishes him a merry Christmas. Seeing a few drips of fresh oil on the ground as O'Brien drives off, Eddie shakes his head, and gets back to work.

Christmas Eve brings the entire tribe together, but not on the track. Eddie and Kathy drive into the church parking lot and, walking toward the newly completed church, Kathy tells Eddie, "the church is really beautiful! Everyone did a really great job!" Eddie replies, "the last time I saw the inside, nothing was finished out." Kathy points out, "your dad did a really great job on the parking lot and the grounds." Eddie looks around for his parent's car, and replies, "I wonder if my mom and dad are here yet."

The church building, constructed by Eddie's father, Mark's father, and Mark, is built out of steel, concrete, and stone. The workers took the

building materials, applied their skill, and built a beautiful cathedral, far better than Dr. Akinmola ever expected. By working on the building, Bobby B., Erika, and Tessa learned some valuable building skills. Mark, responsible for the majority of the stone and brick work, is now an expert stone mason. Even Dr. Akinmola got his hands dirty on this project, helping out wherever he can.

Walking through the door into the narthex, Eddie and Kathy are greeted by Adekunle Akinmola, who tells Eddie, “merry Christmas, my friend!” Eddie and Kathy both reply, “merry Christmas!” Akinmola tells Eddie, “I can’t tell you how happy my father is today. He’s been waiting for this day for five years.” Eddie replies, “I’m glad the building is all done.” Akinmola tells Eddie, “it was finished right on time! God’s timing!”

Eddie’s father and mother walk up, wishing Eddie and Kathy a merry Christmas. Eddie’s mother, Nina, asks Kathy, “are your mom and dad here yet?” Kathy replies, “I don’t know. We just got here.” Eddie comments, “here they come.” Kathy’s parents walk up, wishing everyone, “merry Christmas!” Hugs and kisses are exchanged, as Mark and Paula join the group. Giving Mark a fist bump, Eddie tells Mark, “merry Christmas! The building looks pretty good, bro. Maybe I’ll have you build something for me.” Mark replies, “as long as it’s next year. I have to work on the track across the street first. That has to be done before the Spring.”

Walking up to Eddie and Mark is Mayor Bradford Jamieson, the mayor of the town where Eddie and Mark live. The mayor puts on a perky smile, and asks Eddie and Mark, “so, am I correct in understanding that you guys are our local track stars?” Not recognizing the man, Mark replies, “yeah. That’s us. Who are you?” The mayor, realizing he was being a bit rude, replies, “I’m so sorry. I failed to introduce myself. I am Mayor Jamieson.” Eddie tells the mayor, “merry Christmas.” The mayor tells Eddie and Mark, “merry Christmas.”

Wondering how the mayor knows who he and Eddie are, Mark informs the mayor, “a lot of other track stars are planning to be here tonight too.” Eddie tells Mark, “speaking of track stars, here comes Braden and Wendy.” Mayor Jamieson asks, “oh, so that’s Officer Braden?” Mark replies, “yeah. That’s him.” Eddie wonders how Mayor Jamieson knows that Braden is a police officer. And, Mark potentially found someone new to mess with.

With many people expected to be in attendance, the group walks into the sanctuary together to get a good seat. Within fifteen minutes, the whole tribe is seated in the same area, along with many of their parents. While they are waiting, Eddie asks Mark, “what’s up with the mayor?” Kathy also asks, “yeah, seriously. What’s up with that guy? And, how did he know that you guys ran track?” Eddie replies, “I don’t know. I didn’t even know our town had a mayor. And, how did that guy know that

Braden is a police officer?" Paula comments, "if you ask me, the mayor is kind of spooky. It's kind of weird that he knew who Mark and Eddie are." Yanking Paula's chain, Kathy tells her, "that's really nothing to worry about. He's probably just your everyday garden variety axe murderer." Paula exclaims, "stop it, girl! It's Christmas!" Kathy smiles, knowing exactly what buttons to press to set Paula off.

Dr. Akinmola walks up and, standing in front of the altar, opens the service by announcing, "merry Christmas!" The congregation responds in unison, "merry Christmas!" Dr. Akinmola replies, "that it is, my brothers. That it is!" Dr. Akinmola instructs the congregation, "please turn in your hymnals to hymn number 139, *O Little Town of Bethlehem.*" The organist begins to play, and the congregation sings along with the choir.

Following the hymn, Dr. Akinmola opens with a prayer, then speaks, "in the Gospel according to Luke, in chapter two, verses one through seven, we read, 'In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire inhabited Earth. And, everyone went to his own town to register. So, Joseph also went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.'"

Dr. Akinmola then announces, "please turn in your hymnals to hymn number 144, *What Child is This.*" The organist begins to play, and the congregation sings along with the choir. Eddie takes particular notice of how good the organ sounds. The Flentrop pipe organ, which took a lot of time and trouble to procure, while small, has a very distinct tonal quality to it.

Dr. Akinmola continues to read from the Gospel of Luke, "And, there were shepherds working in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks during the night. An angel of the Lord appeared before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But, the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'"

Dr. Akinmola then announces, "please turn in your hymnals to hymn number 145, *The First Noel.*" The organist begins to play, and the congregation sings along with the choir.

The service continues, as Dr. Akinmola narrates the Christmas story as told in the Gospel of Luke. While Dr. Akinmola is speaking, Kathy whispers to Eddie, “don’t look now, but the mayor has been looking over the entire track team since the service started.” Eddie whispers back, “where is he seated?” Kathy whispers to Eddie, “on the other side of the aisle, in our row.” Eddie casually glances over, seeing that the mayor is not paying one bit of attention to the service. Observing the mayor for a few minutes, Eddie whispers to Kathy, “that guy is a stalker. He’s checking everybody out, not only the track team.”

Following Dr. Akinmola’s reading of scripture, the elders approach the altar, obtaining the offering plates. The Christmas offering is taken up, as the soloist, accompanied by the organ, sings *O Holy Night*. During the offering, Mark whispers to Paula, “everything’s working.” Paula whispers back, asking, “what do you mean?” Mark whispers, “the lights are all working, the heat just kicked in, the organ works, and all that kind of stuff.” To some degree, today’s Christmas service is a test drive for the building that Mark has been working on for the last year.

Also, during the offering, Eddie and Kathy watch the mayor out of the corner of their eyes. The mayor not only frequently looks over at the track team, but at other people as well. One thing is for certain. The mayor is not paying one bit of attention to the service, leaving Kathy and Eddie wondering why he is even present.

The elders walk up the center aisle, and place the offering upon the altar. Next, taking the bread and wine for communion from the altar, the elders distribute the elements to the congregation. The elders return to the altar, and Dr. Akinmola proclaims, “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘this is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’” The congregation eats the bread, followed by Dr. Akinmola proclaiming, “In the same way He also took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’” Finishing Holy Communion, Dr. Akinmola proclaims, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

Dr. Akinmola’s son, Adekunle, stands in front of the congregation, and proclaims, “tonight we light our last candle in the Advent Wreath to remember the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, which we come together to celebrate this Christmas Eve. As the prophets prophesied long ago, the Lord Jesus Christ came to Earth and, like the shepherds, we are filled with wonder and amazement.” Dr. Akinmola’s daughter, Sade, with her mother by her side, lights the Advent candle.

Dr. Akinmola then proclaims, “Lord Jesus, You come as a tiny, fragile baby. Yet, we know that You are God and you are with us. May the flame of this candle remind us that You are the light of the world and that, if we follow You, we will never walk in darkness, but will have the true light of life. We look forward to that day when You will come again and we will behold You face to face with all the angels of heaven.” The congregation responds, “come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.”

The lights of the sanctuary are dimmed, as Adekunle and Sade light their candles from the white candle on the Advent Wreath. Walking down the center aisle side by side, Adekunle and Sade transfer the flame of their candle to that of the person sitting at the end of the pew. As the congregation sings *Silent Night*, each person transfers the flame of their candle to the next in the pew. The sanctuary is again illuminated, this time by the light of everyone’s candles.

When the last verse of *Silent Night* has been completed, everyone blows out their candles, and wishes those around them a merry Christmas. Eddie and Kathy wish each other a merry Christmas, giving each other a Christmas hug, and sneaking in a merry Christmas kiss. The tribe, their parents, and friends all wish each other a merry Christmas. Dr. Akinmola mingles with the congregation, personally wishing everyone a merry Christmas.

Those present from the track team wish each other a merry Christmas, and talk about their plans over the holiday season. Braden and Wendy plan to visit both set of parents tomorrow. Barbara and Johnson will be spending a lot of time together and getting some training in. Bobby B. and Erika will be enjoying the holiday food on a cruise ship, and hitting the ship’s weight room quite often. And, Karen will be driving home tomorrow morning, and will stay until her mother blows a gasket, which should be within a few hours of when Karen walks through the door.

Dr. Akinmola comes up to Eddie, wishing him, “merry Christmas!” Eddie replies, “merry Christmas. The service was beautiful!” Dr. Akinmola tells Eddie, “thank you so much, my friend, for buying the organ for the church. That organ has the most beautiful sound to it.” Eddie replies, “I told you it would sound awesome.” Dr. Akinmola asks, “how did you know how the organ would sound before it got here?” Eddie explains, “I was listening to a classical album with a friend of mine. The organ sounded really awesome. This is that organ.” Dr. Akinmola smiles, and replies, “I’m just glad, my friend, that it came across the Atlantic Ocean in one piece.” The organ actually came across the Atlantic Ocean in several hundred pieces, and reassembled by experts when it arrived.

Standing within earshot of Eddie and Dr. Akinmola’s conversation is Mayor Jamieson, who has surmised that Eddie donated the money for the

church to purchase the organ. Walking away with the details of the conversation, the mayor wonders how someone who is employed as an auto mechanic has the money to purchase a pipe organ. But, Mayor Jamieson is not too surprised. He has already discovered through his sly detective work who purchased the land on which the church sits.

As they are getting ready to leave, Kathy's parents again wish Eddie and Kathy a merry Christmas. Kathy tells her mother, "we'll see you tomorrow!" Kathy's mother tells Kathy, "oh, and I made chocolate mousse." Kathy replies, "oh, good! I'll be sure not to spoil my dessert!"

Eddie's parents walk over to join the group, again wishing everyone a merry Christmas. Eddie's mother tells everyone, "we're really looking forward to seeing everyone tomorrow!" Eddie's mother then tells Kathy, "oh, and I made your favorite dessert!" Eddie tells Kathy, "wow! Aren't you special this year." Kathy smiles, knowing that she will get chocolate mousse for dessert at lunch and dinner. Kathy and Eddie then head out, only to meet up again with their parents tomorrow.

Kathy and Eddie sit in the car for a moment. Kathy mentions, "that was a wonderful Christmas service." Eddie replies, "yeah. It was. And, everything worked." Kathy tells Eddie, "Paula was saying a week ago that Mark was worried that something would go wrong. But, it didn't." Eddie replies, "I guess it's like test flying an airplane."

Abruptly changing the subject, Eddie points out, "it looks like the mayor is sitting in his car, taking notes." Kathy asks, "really? Where's he parked?" Eddie replies, "he's parked under the middle light near the entrance. He's writing stuff down." Kathy laughs, and tells Eddie, "maybe he's taking notes on who's been naughty or nice." Eddie laughs and drives away, wondering why the mayor was acting kind of odd all evening.

The day after Christmas, Eddie and Kathy head out to the airport, going on another Christmas cruise in the Carribean. Joining them again this year is Mark and Paula. This year, since Mark gave Bobby B. a week off, with pay, Bobby B. and Erika will also be joining the group. With a gym and jogging track on the cruise ship, everyone will feel right at home.