

# Eddie, The Collegiate Junior

## Chapter Seven Summer Break

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Early one Monday morning, Mark drives down to Angelo's Service Station with a bulldozer equipped with a backhoe, on a trailer. Eddie comes out to greet Mark, who asks Eddie, "after I knock the house down, what do you want me to do with the lot?" Eddie explains to Mark, "level out the lot, and grade it toward the road. But, be careful of the water and sewer lines. I want to build a storage building where the house is." Mark replies, "got it." Mark looks around, and tells Eddie, "oh, good. My dumpster is already here."

Eddie has purchased the property behind the service station. Mark will be knocking down the house, and grading the lot to Eddie's specifications. Once Mark is finished with the lot, he will build a 4,000 square-foot climate controlled storage building, and an eight-foot high brick wall around the property. Once the project nears completion, Mark, Eddie, and his brother, John, will take care of the landscaping. Eddie wants the storage building finished before the Olympics start, if only so the tribe can watch the games together. Eddie's ultimate goal, however, is to get this project completed before the beginning of track practice this upcoming Autumn. And, Mark has another similar project going on. He is building two large storage buildings, one on each side of the storage yards on Second Street.

In a few days, when Mark is finished preparing Eddie's lot, Mark will head over to the middle school, and rip up the lopsided track in preparation for its conversion to the metric standard. By the time Mark finishes his work at the middle school, the footing and slab for Eddie's storage building will be fully cured, and Mark can begin building the concrete structure. For the wall around the lot behind the service station, Mark will hire the same contractors he used to build the wall around Alistair Crum's family compound.

While Mark is out back working on the lot, Officer Richard Hayes drives into the service station, asking Eddie, “do you have a moment?” Eddie replies, “sure. What’s up?” Eddie knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that whatever Officer Hayes wants is a serious issue, for Officer Hayes usually greets Eddie by announcing, “what’s up?” Officer Hayes walks up, telling Eddie, “this Brad Evans character has filed a complaint against you. He claims you assaulted him.” Now knowing exactly what this is about, Eddie tells Officer Hayes, “wow! I have to hear this one! Let’s go have a seat in the office.”

Eddie and Richard take a seat, and Eddie asks, “what did I do this time?” Reading a copy of the official complaint, Richard replies, “Brad Evans alleges that, on the fourteenth of this month, at about 12:30, you threw him into the ocean, and you and Kathy assaulted him down at the beach. Evans claims he has five witnesses. The witnesses are reported to be the Centerville distance team, who were running on the beach with Evans.” Eddie replies, “really? I’m always here at lunch. I wonder how I got to the beach.”

Eddie peruses the calender sitting on the desk, and tells Richard, “take a look at this.” Eddie points out to Richard, “I remember that day. I was sitting here eating lunch, and you came into the station. You told me that Goldshit was out of the hospital, so I wrote it down on the calender. And, that was a Wednesday. Kathy was in class.” Looking at the calender, Richard nods his head, and replies, “I see that. I remember that now.”

Richard radios the station, “315 to radio.” The dispatch officer replies, “radio to 315. Go ahead.” Richard asks, “please check and see if I was 10-7<sup>1</sup> at Angelo’s Service Station on May 14.” The dispatcher replies, “10-4.”

Eddie tells Richard, “I’m no expert, but Evans seems to be involved in something illegal. He apparently wants me out of the way, just like McCrutchen did.” Reviewing the official complaint, Richard thrusts his finger into the paper, stating, “May 14. 12:30 p.m. That’s when this Evans character said you and Kathy assaulted him. This doesn’t make any sense.” Eddie replies, “that’s because there is no sense in anything those guys do. I was here. You were here. And, Kathy was in class all week. She was at the University. And, they take attendance. I’m sure they can vouch for her.”

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<sup>1</sup> 10-7. Out of Service.

The dispatcher radios Richard, “radio to 315.” Richard replies, “315. Go ahead.” The dispatcher informs Richard, “May 14, records show you were 10-7 at Angelo’s at 12:13. 10-8<sup>2</sup> at 12:48.” Richard replies, “10-4.”

Richard confirms, “you were right. I was here for what it looks like about a half hour on the fourteenth, at the time of the alleged assault.” Eddie tells Richard, “there could be another explanation.” Richard asks, “what’s that?” Eddie explains, “I’m one of the fastest men in the world. You could have turned around, and I could have ran eleven miles to the beach, assaulted Evans, and run back.” Richard laughs, and replies, “you couldn’t have driven there and back in that time. And, even if you did drive to the beach, how would you know Evans was there?” Eddie tells Richard, “well, maybe it was someone who looks like me. Or, maybe I used my time machine that the Chuckie claims I have.” Richard laughs, replying, “a time machine. Yeah. That would explain everything.”

Eddie smiles, and tells Richard, “look. I was here all week. I have the service tickets to prove it. And, you can question the customers. Kathy was in school all week. They have the attendance records to prove it.” Richard makes a few notes, concluding his investigation. Richard tells Eddie, “now, I’m wondering what these characters will dream up next.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “I can only imagine.”

Eddie then suddenly puts his finger in the air, shaking it back and forth as his grandmother often did when words of wisdom were about to be orated, and tells Richard, “hey! Wait a second! If Evans was on the beach at 12:30, his five witnesses should have been in school! What were they doing at the beach?” Richard raises his eyebrows, and replies, “that’s a good point. I tell you. This stuff gets deeper and deeper every time you turn a corner.” Richard tells Eddie, “well, let me get back on the road.” Richard gets back on patrol, and Eddie goes back to check on Mark’s progress.

While Eddie is at work one Saturday morning, Kathy is outside, straightening up the pool area, getting it ready for Summer. Looking toward the driveway, Kathy sees her counterpart riding her bicycle up the driveway. With three universes, and the ability to travel to the past, present, and future, Kathy wonders which of her counterparts is riding up the driveway today.

Kathy’s counterpart yells out, “oh, good! You’re here!” Seeing her counterpart wearing a blue shirt, Kathy asks, “are you coming from the blue universe?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah! And, I have some great news!” Opening the gate to the pool to let her counterpart into the

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<sup>2</sup> 10-8. In Service.

pool area, Kathy asks, “what’s the good news?” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “me and Eddie bought this house! This house came up for sale in our universe and, using the money we made from gold and the stock market, we were able to buy the house! But, we’re still living at Lena’s parent’s house until we get our house fixed up the way we want it.” Kathy gives her counterpart a high-five, and exclaims, “awesome!”

Kathy tells her counterpart, “in your universe, there’s probably a three-acre lot for sale on Orchard Lane. It has a gravel driveway, and about one acre already cleared where someone was going to build a house. In my universe, Mark and Paula live there, and built their own house. Mark and Paula, in your universe, should definitely look into it.” Kathy’s counterpart energetically replies, “I’ll have to tell them about it! It would be really great having them live nearby.”

Remembering that, in the blue universe, Mark and Paula live down the street from Lena’s parent’s on Ivy Avenue, Kathy tells her counterpart, “you guys live really close to each other now.” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “yeah. But, before you guys told us about how to make money through the portal, we all worked long hours. We never really got a chance to do much together. But, now we do.”

Kathy’s counterpart asks Kathy, “so, what’s up in your universe?” Kathy explains, “well, Eddie is about to buy the service station from Angelo.” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “what? Are you serious?” Kathy explains, “yeah. Angelo is moving back to Greece. Angelo is going to buy a service station close to the town where he grew up. He still has a lot of family there.” Kathy’s counterpart asks, “how did all this come about?” Kathy explains, “over the years, Eddie gave Angelo a lot of stock tips. So, Angelo invested a lot of money, and made a whole lot more. The last I heard, Angelo made like three or four million dollars.” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “wow! I’ll definitely have to let my Eddie know! He’d really love to own the service station someday!”

Kathy’s counterpart asks, “what else is going on in your universe?” Kathy replies, “you may not believe this, but Eddie broke the world record in the 100-meter dash, and Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden broke the world record in the 4 by 400-meter relay! Oh! And, Braden broke the world record in the 400-meter dash!” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, asking, “seriously? He did?” Seeing Kathy’s expression, her counterpart, exclaims, “you’re serious! Aren’t you?” Kathy replies, “yeah. Totally.”

Kathy’s counterpart explains, “in my universe, Eddie is working on the house we just bought, and Mark is helping him. Eddie still works out at a gym that just opened up a mile from where we live. He has a little more time now that he cut down his hours at Angelo’s. Mark joins him a lot and they work out together.”

Kathy asks, “in your universe, did Dr. Akinmola start to build the church yet?” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “yeah. Eddie’s father, Mark’s father, and Mark are working on it now. And, I head over there to help with whatever I can.” Kathy smiles, and tells her counterpart, “it sounds like the events in your universe are now really similar to mine, with a slight time delay.”

Out of the blue, Kathy’s counterpart yells out, “oh! And, guess what! Bobby B. came home for a visit, and he’s going to be working on the church project too! And, Erika graduated from the police academy, and those two are back together again!” Kathy exclaims, “wow! Who knows? Maybe the whole group will get back together in your universe someday!” Kathy’s counterpart sighs, and replies, “that would be so nice! I really miss everyone.”

With sudden great excitement, Kathy tells her counterpart, “oh! And I got a job! I’m going to be teaching gym at the elementary school behind my parent’s house! And, Paula is going to be teaching gym and health class at the middle school.” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “really? That’s awesome!” Kathy explains to her counterpart, “Mr. Zunde said Miss Paterno is getting married, and so she’s moving away. And, Mr. Coleman has taken a position somewhere else.” Kathy then tells her counterpart, “you should go down and talk to Mr. Zunde before school lets out. All this came about suddenly, so there may be a position open in your universe too.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “I’m going to do that! I always wanted to be a gym teacher.” With Kathy, wanting to be a gym teacher is, at least, very consistent among the three universes.

Kathy and her counterpart share other stories about their respective universes, and their experience in the red universe. Kathy shows her counterpart the marble portal Mark and Eddie installed behind the Jasmine wall. Neither Kathy nor her counterpart has found any differently colored stones so, at the present time, the parallel universe count remains at three, which are the yellow, blue, and red universes. Kathy’s counterpart heads back to her universe with a few more ideas about what to do around their new house.

About a month later, late on a Friday afternoon, Eddie, Kathy, and Angelo meet at the office of Davies and Rice, L.L.P., to finalize the sale of Angelo’s Service Station. They are joined by Ralph Myles, who will be Eddie’s accountant. Eddie always knew that this day would come someday. Today, Eddie’s dream of owning his own service station has become a reality.

While they are waiting, Angelo tells Eddie, “I’m really glad you wanted to buy the station. But, I have to be honest with you. I really hate to leave you alone here on your own, but I can’t wait to get back to Greece.” Eddie

replies, “don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine.” Angelo tells Eddie, “I know you will. I knew, from the moment I met you, that you’d be a mechanic someday.” Eddie knew that too. For as long as he can remember, Eddie knew he wanted to be a mechanic. Kathy points out, “it sounds like to me that both of you are having your dreams come true.”

Kathy asks Angelo, “did your deal in Greece go through yet?” Angelo replies, “not quite yet. But, everything is all ready to go. I’ll be flying back to Greece in a few days, and I’ll take care of buying the station. Then, I’ll fly back and we’ll pack up and move back there. We got to be out of our house by mid July.” Kathy tells Angelo, “it sounds like you have it all planned out.” Angelo replies, “this is going a lot easier than I ever expected.” That is because Angelo, taking Eddie’s advice, has made almost four million dollars in the stock market. Angelo is paying for the service station in Greece with cash. And, when Angelo finds a house in Greece, he’ll be paying cash for that too.

Mr. Davies calls the group into the conference room where he will briefly discuss the contract, transfer the funds, and answer any questions. As Mr. Davies distributes copies of the paperwork for the real estate transaction, Ralph is the sole person who reads every line, wanting to understand all the details of the deal. Mr. Davies explains that Eddie is purchasing the property on which the service station stands and the building with cash. The tools, and everything else not associated with the actual property, will be a separate transaction. Once the paperwork for the sale of the service station property and building have been executed, Eddie hands over the certified check for its sale.

The focus of the meeting now moves on to the sale of the tools and other related items. Mr. Davies distributes the paperwork and, again, Ralph carefully reads every line. Included in the second sale are the tools, the items in the machine shop, the wheel alignment equipment, and everything else that can be physically moved out of the service station. The list of equipment is itemized on an invoice, explicitly indicating what is included in the sale and how much Eddie is paying for each item.

Once Mr. Davies finishes his brief discussion of the deal, Ralph asks, “may I ask a question regarding this transaction?” Mr. Davies replies, “sure. What is your question?” Ralph asks, “am I correct in understanding that all of the equipment is being sold for just under four-thousand dollars?” Mr. Davies explains, “yes and no. Eddie is purchasing the equipment with twenty-dollar double eagle gold coins. Each coin is valued at about six-hundred dollars apiece at the current price of gold. The total value of the coins approximates the actual value of the equipment. But, since each coin is stamped by the government to be valued at twenty dollars, Eddie and Angelo have come to an agreement to sell the equipment at a discount, technically speaking of course.”

Wanting to understand the logic behind the transaction, Ralph asks, “what is the advantage in doing this?” Mr. Davies explains, “first, equipment purchased at the prices indicated on the invoice cannot be construed to be subject to an ad-valorem tax. That will save Eddie a lot of money every year. Secondly, on paper, it looks like Angelo is taking a severe loss, which will help with his taxes. And, thirdly, Eddie, not the corporation, is purchasing the equipment. The service station will then lease the equipment from Eddie. Rental income is not subject to Social Security taxes. Eddie can lease the equipment from himself for any dollar amount he chooses, so long as it is within reason. The down side is the equipment cannot be depreciated on Eddie’s tax returns but, in the long run, Eddie will gain a distinct advantage.” Ralph replies, “I can’t say I’ve ever seen a transaction like this before.” Mr. Davies wants to tell Ralph that he hasn’t seen anything yet, but rather explains, “you’ll find out that, occasionally, transactions are executed in very creative and esoteric ways.”

Once the paperwork regarding the sale of the equipment is completed, Eddie places a small ammunition can containing the gold on the table. Opening the box, Eddie removes the gold, where Angelo, Mr. Davies, and Eddie count and verify the amount of gold. Never seeing so much gold in one place, Ralph examines one of the coins, seeing that the coin is, in fact, stamped with its face value of twenty dollars. Ralph concludes that Eddie’s transaction, purchasing the equipment with gold, is perfectly legal, especially since the twenty-dollar gold pieces are still technically legal tender.

When the transactions are complete, Eddie tells Angelo, “don’t forget to sell the gold in September, near the first day of Fall, when it will briefly jump above seven-hundred dollars an ounce. Don’t hold on to it, thinking that it will go up more, because it won’t.” Angelo tells Eddie, “you haven’t been wrong yet. Trust me. I’ll sell it when you tell me.” Eddie tells Angelo, “and, when you get to Greece, let me know your address and phone number, so I can keep sending you my stock information.” Angelo replies, “you got it!”

Reminiscing a bit, Angelo tells Eddie, Kathy, Ralph, and Mr. Davies, “I remember when I found the property for the service station. There was an old beat-up house on the lot. It was for sale, so I bought it. Then, the day after the closing, I went over to the property, and stood in the front yard for an hour, wondering what to do next. I really didn’t know where to begin. I remember that day well. It was very cold outside and snowing.”

Angelo then tells Eddie, “your father pulled off the road, and asked me if I needed some help. He said he saw me standing there when he was on his way to pick up a pizza and, on his way home, I was still standing on the corner. So, I told him I just bought the property, and I was going to

knock down the house and put up a service station.” Kathy exclaims, “oh, really? So Eddie has been eating pizza for a really, really long time!” Angelo laughs, and replies, “Eddie must have been about eight or nine years old at the time.”

Angelo continues, “when we were talking, I mentioned that I need to find someone to do the construction. Eddie’s father told me that he could handle the project. He gave me his card, so I called him the next day. I was working for Jake, across town, at the time. Whenever I wasn’t working over at the shop, I would come over and help Eddie’s father with the project, doing whatever I can. The building turned out really nice, especially the brickwork.”

With the transaction complete and another client arriving soon, Mr. Davies excuses himself to get Eddie and Angelo’s paperwork filed. On their way out, the rest of the group stops in the lobby, continuing their conversation.

Angelo then asks Eddie, “so, what are your plans for the station?” Eddie explains, “first, I’ll finish up all the work that’s going on. Then, I think I’ll close down the station for a week or two, and clean up around the shop. But, I think I’ll wait to do that until after the Olympics. I really want to watch the games with the guys.” Angelo replies, “the station can really use a little straightening up. I never bothered doing that because I know exactly where everything is.” Eddie explains, “if I take the time to straighten the place up, I’ll know everything that’s there.” Angelo replies, “good. Because, I don’t even know everything that’s there. Who knows what you’ll find.” Eddie replies, “probably a few old Johnson Rods.” Angelo and Eddie laugh, both knowing that Angelo will be selling a few Johnson Rods when he gets to Greece.

As everyone heads out, Kathy tells Eddie, “congratulations! You have your very own service station!” Eddie tells Kathy, “in a way, this is almost better than winning a race!” Kathy replies, “yeah. I can see that. A race is for the moment. Owning a service station is for a very long time.” Angelo shakes Eddie’s hand, telling him, “thank you for everything. We’ll catch up again before I leave.” Eddie replies, “thank you! And, by the way, my squat rack is still holding up!” Eddie and Kathy head to the pizzeria to celebrate. Angelo heads to his house, passing by the service station on his way. And, Ralph heads out, wondering what in the world just happened in Mr. Davies’ conference room.

The next week, Eddie heads off to work at his service station. When Eddie drives up, Mark, who is constructing the storage building on the land behind the service station, yells out to Eddie, “hey! I’m glad you can show up to work today!” Eddie replies, “yeah, bro! I have to start cleaning

up around here.” Eddie walks behind the service station with Mark to check on the progress of the construction.

Mark tells Eddie, “I’m almost done.” Eddie replies, “I see that. It’s looking good, bro!” Mark elaborates on the progress, telling Eddie, “the guys should have the wall done by the end of the week. The emergency generator for the station is working. The sprinkler system is working. I’ll have the topsoil spread by the end of the day. Bobby B. will be here soon to help me do that. Then, we can start putting down the sod. Everything should be done by the time the Olympics start.” Looking around, Eddie replies, “awesome!”

Changing the subject, Eddie tells Mark, “with Angelo gone, I need to find a mechanic. I need someone to change oil, pump gas, and that sort of thing.” Mark asks, “how many hours are you going to work now?” Eddie explains, “after I get this place cleaned up, maybe twenty hours a week. If I can get someone here part time, everything will go a little smoother.” Mark suggests, “why don’t you hire Nachlobrocklin?” Eddie laughs, and replies, “he’ll torch the place if someone mispronounces his name!” Mark laughs, and tells Eddie, “well, there’s always the Chuckie.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “yeah, right. The Chuckie. I should have thought about that myself.”

Mark tells Eddie, “actually, Bobby B. might be interested. When Paula starts working at the middle school, I’m going to be cutting my hours down, and working the hours that she’s working. I want to get home, and get cleaned up by the time Paula gets home, so we can do stuff together after work.” Eddie replies, “that’s a good idea, bro! I think I’ll do the same.” Mark adds, “and, on all those school holidays, I’m not working.” Mark just gave Eddie some food for thought. Bobby B. then drives up, and goes to work with Mark spreading the topsoil.

Eddie walks to the front of the service station, where Officer Richard Hayes is just driving up. Eddie yells out to the officer, “what’s up?” Richard replies, “what’s up?” Eddie explains, “I bought the service station from Angelo! He’s moving back to Greece!” Richard responds, “he’s been talking about that on and off for about two years now. He said you were going to buy it. So, he actually went through with it?” Eddie replies, “yeah. It all happened pretty quickly.”

Officer Hayes asks Eddie, “did you hear that crash down the street a while ago?” Eddie replies, “no. I must have been busy.” Officer Hayes explains, “you really got to hear this one. Get this. A long dump truck was driving down the road, and lost one of the rear wheels. Fortunately, there are eight wheels in the rear. So, the wheel bounces down the street, and hits a car coming in the other direction, damaging the front end and breaking the windshield. The car then hits the power pole.” Eddie asks,

“is the guy all right?” Officer Hayes replies, “I think so. He sideswiped the pole. Fortunately, he didn’t hit the pole head on.” Officer Hayes continues, “the dump truck driver then stops, and goes over to help this character who hit the pole.”

Explaining what happened at the accident site, Officer Hayes continues, “then, I arrive at the scene, and start sorting all this out. This character driving the car stated the wheel was bouncing down the street, and he tried to avoid it, but there was no way to avoid the collision. So, the wheel hits this character’s car, breaks the windshield, and then the car hits the power pole. Pretty cut and dry, right?” Eddie replies, “yeah. Sounds like it.”

Officer Hayes continues, “now, follow me here. This character driving the dump truck claims the wheel that hit the car is not his wheel. So, we have a dump truck with a missing wheel, a wheel laying on the ground that matches the other wheels on his dump truck, and this character is claiming that it’s not his wheel.” Eddie laughs, and exclaims, “you’ve got to be kidding me!” Officer Hayes replies, “I wish I was. Then, this dump truck character tells me that the wheel was someone else’s wheel, and that wheels fall off trucks all the time. So, I asked him why he stopped. His answer was that he saw a motorist in need.” Eddie laughs, and mentions, “the last time I checked, wheels just don’t fall off trucks!” Officer Hayes replies, “you know that. I know that. But, I’m telling you. You just can’t even begin to make this stuff up.”

After catching up on a few other things, Richard asks Eddie, “hey, what do you know about this Mayor Bradford Jamieson character?” Eddie explains, “as far as I know, nobody likes the guy. For some reason, he always shows up at our track meets. At the divisional meet, we saw him with Brad Evans and McCrutchen. And, he occasionally shows up at Dr. Akinmola’s church. When he does, he looks around, paying more attention to who is there rather than the service.”

Eddie asks, “so, what’s up with the mayor?” Richard explains, “I’m not 100 percent sure. But, I do know this. The more I look around, the more I see some sort of illegal activity and fraud. The guy lives in a house that suggests he’s a brain surgeon or something. And, I’ve had a few complaints about how city hall is being run over there. He’s definitely up to something. I just can’t put my finger on it.” Eddie offers, “I’ll keep my eyes open. If I find out anything, I’ll definitely let you know.” Richard replies, “thank you. I’m going to need some help with this one. It’s not like I can just ask this character, ‘hey, what kind of criminal activity are you involved in?’ and expect a confession.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “if it was that easy, you can just tell all the criminals to report to jail, and they’d show up with a list of their crimes.” Richard then gets back on the road, and Eddie starts his day.

Mid July marks the beginning of the Summer Olympics. Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula have planned a two-week long party, where the track team and their friends can come over and watch the games. The party will alternate between Eddie and Kathy's house and Mark and Paula's house. Everyone on the track team is invited, and can watch the events on television or hang out at the pool.

On the day of the 100-meter dash final, the party is held at Eddie and Kathy's home. The catering van from the pizzeria drives up, meaning lunch has arrived. Kathy, Eddie, and Paula head to the door to help Arianna with the pizza. Each of them grab a few boxes of pizza, bringing them inside, as Arianna brings in the salad and bread sticks. Kathy tells Eddie, "wow! I think we'll have enough for dinner too!" Eddie replies, "yeah, for you. For everyone else, we have steak, potato skins, and veggies for dinner."

Overhearing Eddie and Kathy's conversation is Angela Meadows, from the radio station, who mentions, "all you guys really love pizza!" Kathy replies, "yeah! It has all the food groups." Paula laughs, exclaiming, "exactly! Pizza is the base of Kathy's food pyramid." Kathy laughs, and replies, "it is not!" Paula counters, telling everyone, "oh, yes it is, girl. On the base of Kathy's food pyramid is a sixteen-inch pizza. On top of that, is a fourteen-inch pizza. And, on top of that, is a ten-inch pizza. And, on top of that, is an eight-inch pizza with a pot of chocolate mousse on the very top." Everyone around laughs hysterically, prompting Kathy to add, "hey now! You left out the bread sticks and garlic butter!"

During the party, Angelo drives up with his wife and two kids, and joins the group. Ready to move back to Greece, Angelo stops by to say goodbye to Eddie and Kathy. Eddie introduces Angelo and his family to everyone, many of who have not met Angelo before. Angelo greets everyone, and takes a seat by the pool side with Eddie. Kathy brings out a few plates, and Angelo's family indulges in a few slices of pizza and salad.

Over lunch, Angelo tells Eddie, "you got a really big party going on here!" Eddie explains, "yeah. Most of the people here are from the track team. We're all watching the Olympics together. Well, at least when the track events are on. Most of the time, everyone is out here at the pool or downstairs in the gym working out. Tomorrow, we'll continue the party at Mark's house." Angelo asks, "where does Mark live?" Eddie replies, "he lives about a mile from here."

Now curious, Angelo asks, "is Mark investing in the stock market, too?" Eddie replies, "yeah. A few of these guys are." Angelo tells Eddie, "I'm really glad you told me about the stocks. It's really made a big difference in my life." Angelo's wife mentions, "me, too. Now, we can move back to Greece. It's been really nice living here, but I'm ready for a

change. I miss the old country.” After a while, Angelo heads out to a hotel near the airport, where he and his family will stay overnight before their flight tomorrow.

Heading inside, awaiting the 100-meter dash final, Eddie takes a seat in front of the television. Wondering whether the winning time will be better than his time of 9.93 seconds that he ran earlier in the Spring, this is one event Eddie certainly does not want to miss. Kathy tells Eddie, “I’m going to go outside and get everyone. Don’t let them start without me.” Eddie replies, “I’ll call them at the stadium and let them know.”

Kathy comes outside to the pool, and yells out to everyone, “hey! The 100-meter dash final is on soon! Everybody, come inside!” Not wanting to miss this event, everyone in the pool gets out, dries off, and heads inside.

As they are walking in, Braden tells Johnson, “it don’t matter who wins. They ain’t beating Eddie!” Quite confident in himself, Johnson replies, “they ain’t beating me or you either.” Johnson then asks Braden, “when is the 400-meter final?” Braden replies, “it’s on July 30, so they gave me that day off work. And, I also have August 1 off, because that’s when the 4 by 400-meter relay is. Ain’t no one kicking our ass, even though we ain’t gonna be there.” Braden and Johnson walk inside, grabbing a slice of pizza before the race begins.

Inside, there is standing room only. Sitting right in front of the television is Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer, the University’s three 100-meter dash stars. The chatter in the room rises, as everyone finds a place where they can see the upcoming race. Eddie comments, “it seems like these commercials are going to drag on forever.” Mark replies, “that’s because they know you’re watching, bro.” With the televised action focusing back on the track, Braden announces, “here it comes.” Silence falls over the room, as the runners walk up to the blocks.

As the runners get into the blocks, Eddie whispers to Mark, “so, that’s what we look like to the spectators.” Mark whispers back, “why doesn’t that guy stop bouncing up and down and get behind the blocks?” The lone hyperactive runner finally gets into the blocks, joining the other finalists. Once the runners are motionless, the gun is fired.

Everyone in the room watches intently as what appears to be eight tiny action figures running down the track. The camera angle changes to get a better view of the finish line, and the runner wearing number 290 pulls ahead of the pack right at the finish. In about ten seconds, the race is all over. Eddie comments, “wow! That was over really fast! It seems like it goes a whole lot slower when you’re on the track!” Mark replies, “you got that right!”

The times are posted, and Eddie exclaims, “yes!” The time delivered by the gold medalist is 10.25 seconds, not quite up to par when compared with Eddie’s personal best time of 9.93 seconds. Everyone in the room cheers, and gives Eddie a high-five. Eddie tells Mark, “you would have won the silver medal!” Eddie is on top of the world that he would have won the gold medal at the Olympics, but ticked off that he was denied his chance to try. Eddie sarcastically yells out, “thank you, Mr. President!” Braden exclaims, “his flimsy ass ain’t never gonna get reelected!” Everyone agrees with Braden, and all are sorely ticked off at the President’s boycott of the Olympics.

As the day moves on, the television programming shifts toward other events so most of the group heads outside to the pool. Bobby B. hangs around inside, hoping to get a glimpse of the weightlifting competition. Eddie and Mark take a seat outside at the table. With no swimming events being televised at the moment, Tessa heads outside to the pool. Walking by Eddie, Tessa dives into the pool, and starts swimming laps with ferocious energy that tells Eddie that he may own the world record in the 100-meter dash, but the pool is a different story.

A few days later, on Wednesday, the party is at Mark and Paula’s house. Braden is particularly fired up, because today is the 400-meter dash final. Everyone is aware of Braden’s world record time of 43.75 seconds, including the competitors at the games. And, Bobby B. will be definitely paying close attention to today’s activities, which include the shot-put final.

With various sports competitions simultaneously underway, most track and field events are videotaped, and broadcast back to back after they occurred. Inside, a few track team members watch the games. Outside, at the pool, Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. are hanging out and cooling off, waiting for someone to announce that some track event is about to start.

Eddie asks Mark, “so, how’s the track over at the middle school coming along?” Mark explains, “the old track has been ripped up. The surveyor has it all marked out. Zaino said the forms will be delivered shortly. Once they’re in place, the new curb can be installed. We have to get it done by the time school starts. And, Bobby B. has been turning it into a great workout.”

Not knowing exactly what Mark means by his comment, Eddie asks, “what do you mean, ‘a great workout?’” Mark explains to Eddie, “he picks up the chunks of concrete, and does exercises with them. Then, he carries them over to the dumpster, and throws them inside. He could have just as easily walked them through the back of the dumpster, since there’s a door that opens.” Coming to his defense, Bobby B. exclaims,

“hey! It’s hard work!” Mark laughs, and replies, “yeah, only because you make it hard work! You could have just as easily loaded the concrete chunks into the front end loader, and driven it to the dumpster. But, no. You carry them one by one to the dumpster, doing curls or overhead presses with them on the way.” Bobby B. admits, “okay! I’m busted. But, hey! I’m a lot better now at the shot-put than I was last Spring at the divisional meet.” But, Mark doesn’t really care that Bobby B. turns work into a workout. Mark does the same thing.

During the conversation, Mark tells Bobby B., “by the way, I’m going to be slowing down a little once Paula starts teaching at the middle school. So, you may want to try to pick up some of your own work.” Bobby B. replies, “I can do that. And, I need a little break myself.” Braden interjects, “yeah, I’d say! From carrying all that concrete!” It seems that Bobby B.’s unusual style of integrating a workout into his daily work routine is the center of today’s conversation.

Eddie mentions to Bobby B., “I have a job opening at the service station, if you’re interested.” Bobby B. asks, “what’s that?” Eddie explains, “it’s really easy compared to Mark’s back breaking labor. The job is pumping gas, doing oil changes, rotating tires, flushing radiators, changing wiper blades, and that sort of stuff. And, whoever I’m going to hire will eventually move in to doing more complicated stuff. So, you’ll basically be a mechanic trainee.” Thinking that being a mechanic might not be a bad profession, Bobby B. asks, “seriously?” Eddie replies, “yeah, bro. Seriously. I need someone to do the small stuff while I do the major repairs.” Happy to do something that is interesting to him, Bobby B. tells Eddie, “sure. I’ll give it a try.” To Bobby B., the job at the service station sounds like a break compared with working for Mark.

Continuing with roasting Bobby B., Braden tells Eddie, “he’s gonna be doing shrugs and lateral raises with your tool boxes. And, if you have an axle laying around, he’s going to be doing overhead presses with that.” Mark tells Eddie, “and, when you change a tire, he can just hold the car up by the bumper for you.” Eddie adds, “or, I can get him to get under the car, and bench press the car off the ground.” Mark turns toward Bobby B., and tells him, “and, you thought that job was going to be easy.”

Over at another table, Dagmar is having a conversation with Karen, which ultimately comes around to training. Realizing Karen is the fastest woman on the team, Dagmar asks, “are you doing something special with your training? Or, how did you get to be so fast?” Karen explains, “last Summer, I was training with Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula. This Summer, we’re all still training together whenever we can. Erika and Tessa join us a lot.” With sudden interest, Dagmar asks, “really? Where do you train, and what do you do?” Karen explains their typical workout, which

includes bicycling, using the resistance sled, swimming, weightlifting, and, of course, running.

Dagmar, seeing the group that Karen trains with is top notch, asks, “is there any chance that I could train with you guys? Clearly wanting to do far more than excel at track, Dagmar wants to be part of the inner circle. Karen replies, “I’m sure that would be okay. But, we’re sprinters, and you run distance. I’m not sure the training would be the same.” Dagmar points out, “but, looking at Eddie, Mark, Eric, and Axel, they’re sprinters, and they all can break a four-minute mile. There must be something you guys are doing differently.” Karen tells Dagmar, “come and join us sometime.” Dagmar takes Karen up on her offer, hoping to gain an edge before next year’s season begins.

Paula comes out to the pool area, and announces, “hey, everyone! The 400-meter is going to start soon!” Braden rushes out of the pool, and dries off on his way inside, wanting a front row seat. Paula then announces, “it starts in about ten or fifteen minutes!” Everyone else follows, not in quite the rush that Braden is in.

Braden takes a seat in a bean bag chair right in front of the television set. Braden blurts out, “let’s get this ass kicking underway! I’m not even there, and I’m gonna win!” Hoffer asks, “bro! How are you going to win if you’re not there?” Braden exclaims, “I own the world record! Ain’t no one on that track gonna beat me! I won this race two months ago! These guys are just fighting it out for the position as an ass kicker trainee!” Braden appears extremely confident that his world record will stand, and continues ranting as the pre-race commentary and commercials begin playing.

The runners enter the track through a tunnel, and quickly move into their lanes. Each runner is introduced, and waves to the crowd. Braden sits back, and is unusually quiet. With no further ado, the runners get into the blocks. The gun is fired, and the 400-meter dash final is underway. With all eyes glued to the television screen, no one utters a word. Braden watches intently, for once, seeing a 400-meter dash as a spectator rather than a participant.

With the race now underway, Braden, unusually quiet for once, is studying what is transpiring on the television screen as if there is going to be a test afterwards. Halfway through the race, Eddie whispers to Kathy, “so, this is the world’s best? They’re not any better than we are.” Kathy replies, “that’s because our country is led by the world’s worst.” As the end of the race draws near, Braden’s eyes are glued to the timer on the screen.

The winner crosses the finish line, and the winning time is displayed next to Braden's world record. First place goes to a runner who ran 400 meters in 44.60 seconds, which is almost one second slower than Braden's world record of 43.75 seconds. Seeing the time, Braden stands up, and screams at the television, "I'm faster than your fat ass! Get your flimsy ass off the track! Stop trying to act like you won something! I'm still the greatest ass kicker of all time!" Everyone gives Braden a high-five, knowing that, if he were at the event, the gold medal would have been his. And, Johnson's time in the divisional meet of 44.98 seconds would have afforded him fifth place if he and Braden were both in the race.

Braden grabs a slice of pizza and, seeing the event he wanted to see today, heads back outside with Wendy. Bobby B. also heads outside, telling everyone to let him know when the shot-put final is about to start. Once Braden is outside, Kathy tells Eddie, "Braden sounds fired up, but he's really upset." Eddie replies, "yeah. I know exactly how he feels." Kathy then asks Eddie, "should I make the announcement today?" Eddie replies, "you can. But, I'm still not going. I have to be at work." Kathy tells Eddie, "okay, I'll make the announcement after the shot-put final."

Outside, at a table, Eddie and Braden discuss the 400-meter dash. Braden confides in Eddie, telling him, "this really sucks. That was my medal. This President ain't worth a shit." Eddie agrees, telling Braden, "yeah. I know, bro. You work your whole life, and that asshole just wipes away all your work with his pen. He's no different than Mr. Crum or Dean Grimsby. They're all a bunch of losers."

Braden then explains to Eddie, "next year, on that track, I'm gonna mess with everyone. I'm gonna stand at the finish line, waiting for number two to show up. Then, right before he gets there, I'm gonna walk across that line backwards." Eddie replies, "in football, that would be a fifteen-yard penalty for taunting the opponent." Braden laughs, and replies, "I know. But, it won't matter none anyway. There ain't no penalties in track." Eddie mentions, "unless your name is McCrutchen, and you can't take hold of a baton." Braden laughs and replies, "that's a ten-yard penalty on the track, because that's how far I shoved his ass."

Eddie mentions to Braden, "for the last year or two, we've all been training really hard because of the distant possibility of making the Olympics. As we got closer, the possibility got more and more real, so we all trained even harder. Now, some of us are better than the athletes in the Olympics." Braden replies, "yeah. You got that right." Eddie continues, "but, here's a problem. What's going to motivate us, as a team, next year? I mean, like, Stone is really bummed out. He's probably not going to practice with the team anymore. Kathy's not going to keep up her training for four more years at the level she has been. And, next

year is our last year at the University. Then what? What's after that?" Braden replies, "I see what you mean."

Sitting back, and thinking, Braden suggests, "maybe we should all try out for football again." Eddie laughs, and asks Braden, "hey, do you remember Matt Wood?" Braden replies, "yeah. He threw the shot-put when we were freshmen in high school. That guy was big!" Eddie explains, "he's now sacking quarterbacks. I've watched him play. I'm not too sure I'd want to be on the other end of that." Braden mentions, "well, we all have our jobs. I'm grateful for mine." Eddie replies, "well, next year, all the other teams will be afraid of us. We'll be okay. We'll just kick their asses for fun, bro." With the temperature rising, Eddie and Braden join the others in the pool.

Later in the afternoon, Paula goes outside, and announces, "they said the shot-put final is coming up soon, but they didn't say when!" The pool empties out again, and it's a good thing that it's hot outside to keep everyone's towels dried off. On the way inside, Erika asks Bobby B., "do you think someone will beat you?" Bobby B. replies, "I don't know. The preliminaries were two days ago, and some of those guys looked really good." Erika pulls Bobby B's. arm, telling him, "come on. Let's get a good seat." Erika and Bobby B. walk in, finding that the bean bag chair right in front of the television has been reserved for them.

While commercials are playing, Kathy stands up and yells out to everyone, telling them, "now that everyone is together, I have an announcement to make! Mr. Frazier, Provost Leighton, and my dad are going to be at our house on Friday, August 1, for the 4 by 400-meter final and the 1,500-meter final. I'm sure that Mr. Frazier would like to see everyone! So, spread the word and everyone be there!" Everyone will be there anyway, but Kathy just wanted to make sure. Kathy, however, knows a bit more than what she was allowed to announce today.

The shot-put final gets underway, which is presented in quite a different format than the track events. The shot-put event, which would normally take more than one hour to complete, is compressed on television down to a few minutes, where only the highlights are presented. As the event progresses, Bobby B. has not yet seen a throw that has exceeded his winning throw of 21.13 meters at the Spring divisional meet. But, saving all the excitement for the end, the network airs the winning throw last, delivered by a Soviet with a throw of 21.35 meters.

The announcer boringly announces the gold, silver, and bronze medalists, and the distance that they threw the shot-put. The winning throw is announced to be 21.35 meters, with the silver medalist throwing 21.08 meters, and the bronze medalist throwing 21.06 meters.

In contrast to the boring television commentator, Bobby B. exclaims, "I would have got the silver medal!" Mark asks, "what did you throw?" Bobby B. exclaims, "I threw 21.13 meters! I would have got the silver medal!" Everyone congratulates Bobby B., giving him a generous supply of high-fives and fist bumps. Bobby B's. throw of 21.13 meters would have missed the gold medal by about ten inches. But, you never know. Were Bobby B. at the Olympics, he might have found the energy to push the sixteen-pound steel ball just a little farther and taken the gold medal. And, since Bobby B. has been doing exercises while at work, he might just have taken the gold medal.

Once most of the guests have left, out of the blue, Kathy tells Eddie, "hey, Eddie! I want a Volkswagen Bus." Eddie asks, "why do you want one of those?" Kathy explains, "well, we're going to have a family someday, and it's not like three of us are going to be driving around in my Porsche, your MGB, or my Dune Buggy." Eddie replies, "you do have a point, but why a Volkswagen Bus? You do know that a Bus has, at best, 70 horsepower, don't you?" Kathy confidently asks, "well, Mr. Mechanic, how are we going to get more horsepower?"

Eddie thinks for a minute, and proposes, "maybe I can put a Porsche engine in it. Then, it might get to sixty miles an hour before the sun sets." Kathy exclaims, "you can't be serious!" Eddie laughs, and replies, "sweetie, the VW Bus does zero to sixty in anywhere from 22 to 75 seconds. And, that's when it's empty. If you put me, Mark, Bobby B., Braden, and Johnson in it, it won't even make it to sixty miles an hour." Now not so excited, Kathy asks Eddie, "you're serious, aren't you?" Eddie replies, "yeah, sweetie. But, I'll talk to Kurt, and see if he knows how easy it is to put a Porsche engine in it."

Quite confident that Eddie can put a Porsche engine in a Volkswagen Bus, Kathy tells Eddie, "okay, then! I'll start looking for a Bus, and you can find me a Porsche engine!" Already thinking about how to solve the problem, Eddie tells Kathy, "I suppose that, if I reinforce the engine mounting points, and drop the whole 911 or 930 drive train in, it will work." As if the project has already been completed, Kathy exclaims, "see that? I knew you could do it! After all, you did mention once that you were looking for another project." Eddie replies, "I did say that, didn't I?" One way or another, there appears to be a Volkswagen Bus in Kathy's future.

The last day of the seemingly perpetual Summer party is on a Friday, which is the final day for the track and field events. The two big events of the day for the University track team are the 4 by 400-meter relay and the 1,500-meter run. By early afternoon, most everyone on the team has arrived, but not for the events. Pizza is on the lunch menu, which no one

wants to miss. And, with the weather being quite hot outside, what could be better than a relaxing afternoon in the pool.

At the party today are Mr. Frazier and his wife, Dawn. Kathy's father, Dr. Karakova, and Kathy's mother are also present at the party today. Joining them is Mr. Zunde, who lives just down the street. The team's assistant coach, Provost Leighton, was also invited, and has graciously accepted the invitation. Very interested in today's 1,500-meter race, Provost Leighton's son, Darryl Stone, will be watching along with Mitchell and Akinmola.

As Eddie and Kathy are preparing for the pizza delivery, Kathy whispers to Eddie, "my dad said something about making the announcement after the 4 by 400-meter relay." Eddie replies, "I'm still not going." Kathy replies, "I know. I just thought I'd tell you." Eddie asks, "does anyone else know?" Kathy replies, "no. Just you and me." Eddie asks, "how about Paula? Does she know?" Kathy replies, "no." Eddie smiles, and asks, "really, Katarina? How in the world did you manage that?" Kathy sighs, and tells Eddie, "I had to listen to my father. He told me not to tell anyone, except for you." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "yeah. You just didn't want to get a spanking." Kathy laughs, bumps Eddie's hip, and tells him, "yeah, right. Like that's going to happen."

Bobby B. walks up to Eddie, and asks, "so, when can I start working?" Eddie offered Bobby B. a job at the service station a few days ago. Apparently, Bobby B. has thought about Eddie's offer some more, and wants to get started soon. Eddie explains, "next week, I'm going to start cleaning up around the station. I should reopen about two weeks after that. You can start then."

Eddie then informs Bobby B., "some really interesting people come into the station." Confident that he can handle anything, Bobby B. asks, "oh yeah? Who's that?" Eddie replies, "well, Mr. Crum used to come in until he went to jail. And, let's see. There's Jimmy O'Brien, Mr. O'Brien, the Chuckie, and Mrs. Black. Oh, and Goldshit came into the station once, but I had to kick the shit out of him." Bobby B. smiles, and replies, "it sounds like the good old days!"

Everyone has been waiting for the 4 by 400-meter relay, especially the acclaimed undefeated relay team of Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden. Hearing the announcement on television, Kathy heads outside to inform everyone that the relay will be starting soon. Inside, Dr. Karakova, Mr. Frazier, and Provost Leighton are having a private conversation off to the side. Getting a front row seat, each with a slice of pizza, is the acclaimed 4 by 400-meter relay team, not so patiently waiting for the event to begin.

Provost Leighton, seeing the athletes getting on the track, mentions, "the stands look relatively empty. There are certainly a lot of empty seats for such a prestigious event." Mr. Frazier replies, "that's because half the world isn't there." Braden interjects, "yeah. Me included." Braden is still a bit ticked off that someone else is wearing the Olympic gold medal that he would have likely won were he participating in the 400-meter dash.

As one of the runners prematurely gets into the blocks, Johnson asks, "what's wrong with that guy? Someone had to tell him what to do." Braden replies, "that's because it's his first time on the track. His ass ain't never run before." Mark comments, "yeah. I can see that. They got the second string out on the track today. The first string is sitting right here." Braden laughs, and replies, "that sounds like something I would say."

After the runners are in the "set" position for an uncomfortably long time, the gun is finally fired. Everyone in the room is quiet as the first lap gets underway. The leader in the first lap runs at a pace that is very familiar to the University's 4 by 400-meter relay team. As the leaders approach the transition zone, Braden exclaims, "those guys are fast!" Eddie confidently replies, "not as fast as we are, bro." Clearly a world class performance, the first handoff occurred with about 45 seconds on the clock.

Halfway through the second leg, Mr. Frazier comments, "right now, it looks like a three-team race." Somewhat fired up, Braden replies, "that's because we're not there! If we were there, it would be a one-team race! Everyone else would have just shown up for their ass kicking." Seeing a less than optimal handoff, Mr. Frazier announces to the group, "everyone, watch their handoffs! And, compare it with yours!"

On the transition to the third leg, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "did you see that! He had to turn around to get the baton, and lost some ground! That is exactly why we use the technique we do! And, that's why you guys are so good!" Now a two-team race, the field of runners has spread significantly, with the leading team on track to run a three-minute composite time.

As the transition is made to the anchor leg, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "these guys are clocking!" The team in the lead would have given the acclaimed 4 by 400-meter relay team a run for their money. As the two front runners approach the finish line, Braden exclaims, "they ain't beating us!" Still running at full speed, the front runner's time is on the screen next to the world record. The entire track team cheers, seeing the race still underway when the clock on the screen runs right by the world record of 2:56.02. Crossing the finish line with a time of 3:01.08, the

team taking the gold medal is slightly more than five seconds slower than the University's world record holders.

Braden stands up, and exclaims, "we kicked their ass, and we weren't even there! They wouldn't stand a chance against us!" Johnson agrees, telling Braden, "if we were out there, it would be a one-team race!" High-five's and congratulations are exchanged by everyone, knowing that they truly are a world-class track team.

Once the energy level has dropped, Dr. Karakova announces, "now that everyone is together, I have an announcement to make." Provost Leighton asks, "is everyone here?" Kathy replies, "hold on. Let me check," and heads outside to check the pool area. Eddie checks downstairs, seeing if anyone is working out in the gym. Eddie and Kathy return, and Kathy announces, "it looks like we're all here." Dr. Karakova tells Kathy, "then, I guess we can start."

Silence falls over the room, as Dr. Karakova walks in front of the television set and turns down the volume. With all eyes on the University's athletic director, Dr. Karakova announces, "I've known many of you since middle school, and some of you a lot longer. When Kathy was a sophomore in high school, after a track meet, many of the track team members were congregated in my back yard, where they were enjoying pizza. Walking out back, and seeing the group, I asked, 'so, who are my future exercise science students?' Much to my surprise, Barbara, Paula, Eric, Kathy, and a few others, raised their hand and expressed interest. I never thought, at that time, that seven years later I would be standing here making this announcement." Kathy stands in the back of the group, in their kitchen, alongside Eddie, already knowing the details of the announcement that is about to come.

Now with everyone's full attention, Dr. Karakova announces, "this past Spring, several members of this team were responsible for breaking three records in track and field. I'm sure that everyone saw that, when the 4 by 400-meter relay was underway, Eddie, Mark, Eric, and Axel's world record time was displayed on the television screen. These accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. The President of our country has even taken notice of the three world records that were broken in our Spring divisional meet. He is also very well aware that the University's track team won nearly all the medals during that meet. Noting your accomplishments, the President has invited the members of the University's track team for dinner and an evening with the President at the White House." Most of the team members cheer, knowing that being invited to the White House is a great honor. Other team members, Eddie included, stand with their arms crossed, not showing quite as much excitement as one would expect.

As planned, Mr. Frazier takes the floor and announces, “this is a great honor. It’s not every day that someone is invited to the White House. If we accept the invitation, the date of the event is September 7. You can discuss this among yourselves, and let me or Provost Leighton know if we, as a team, will be attending.” Mr. Frazier, quite aware of the animosity between some team members and the President, is giving the team a choice whether they choose to attend or not. Chatter arises among the team members, who discuss the President’s invitation among themselves.

From the kitchen, Eddie announces to the team, “you guys can go if you want, but I’m not going.” Echoing the sentiment, Braden adds, “me neither. I ain’t going. Not unless he has a gold medal waiting for me! And, I want solid gold!” Making an excuse, Mark announces, “I can’t go anyway, because I have to get the track finished at the middle school.” Bobby B. adds, “well, if Mark is working, then I have to work too.” With a totally valid excuse, Johnson points out, “I have to be at work. That’s my first week on the job at the high school.” Hearing the core team members expressing their opinion, all the team members express the same sentiment.

While the issue is being discussed among the team members, Eddie whispers to Kathy, “if no one comes from the future to tell me to accept the invitation, how bad of a decision can it really be?” Kathy replies, whispering, “that’s a really good point. If you’re making a big mistake by not going, we would have come from the future by now to tell us to accept the invitation.” Eddie whispers to Kathy, “it’s not like I’m about to take an antibiotic or something.” Kathy bumps Eddie’s hip with hers, whispering, “seriously! This is not a life or death situation. And, it’s not like someone is going to break into our house.”

Considering the President’s decree of boycotting the Olympics, Mr. Frazier is not surprised that the team is unexcited and nonchalant about the invitation. But, he, Dr. Karakova, and Provost Leighton are just the messengers. Provost Leighton asks the group, “am I to take it that we, as a team, are declining the President’s invitation?” Provost Leighton unmistakably hears the team unanimously decline the President’s invitation. Wanting to be sure, Provost Leighton asks, “by a show of hands, is there anyone who would like to accept the President’s invitation?” No one raises their hand, prompting the provost to announce, “okay, then. That’s settled. I’ll go ahead and decline the invitation next week.” With the announcement now history, most everyone heads out to the pool to relax while Eddie and Mark put a few steaks on the grill.

Outside, at the pool, Angela gets into the water, joining Kathy, Paula, and Karen, who are discussing their childhoods. Taking the opportunity to put Angela on the spot, Kathy quickly tells Angela, “it’s your turn!”

Angela asks, “my turn for what?” Paula explains, “we were talking about the stupid things we believed when we were kids. And, it’s your turn.”

Angela laughs, and replies, “where do I start? Okay, so the North Pole is at the top of the world, and it’s really cold there. And, since it’s so cold, there’s always snow at the North Pole. So, from the North Pole, the farther South you go, the warmer it gets. So, when I was a kid, I thought that the South Pole must be a really, really hot place!” The other women laugh, as Kathy exclaims, “hey! That seems perfectly reasonable to me!”

Angela continues, telling everyone, “oh yeah, and when I was a kid, the Vietnam war started. I thought the war was like 30 miles away from where we lived, not halfway around the world. So, at night, I opened the window in my bedroom to see if I can hear the bombs exploding. I had no idea the world is as big as it was, and that Vietnam was all the way on the other side of the world.” The women laugh, knowing that they thought equally silly things when they were younger.

Karen then tells everyone, “when I was in high school, someone stole a ‘Do Not Pass’ road sign and hung it in my high school math classroom. So, we all thought the teacher was trying to send us a subliminal message to make us all get lower grades. Oh, and whoever put it there, screwed it to the concrete wall, so it hung there for weeks before it got taken down.” Paula laughs, and exclaims, “that sounds like something Mr. Crum would do!” Kathy exclaims, “yeah! Seriously!”

Once the laughter settles down, Kathy tells Paula, “it’s your turn again!” Paula quickly splashes Kathy, giving her a little more time to think. Kathy splashes Paula back, and tells her, “if you can’t think of anything, I can suggest a few things.” Paula splashes Kathy back, and tells her, “no you won’t, girl.” Paula goes underwater, denying Kathy the chance of splashing her back.

Paula then surfaces, and explains, “when we were in biology class in tenth grade, the teacher said that we only use 10 percent of our brain.” Kathy starts laughing, and tells everyone, “this is so good!” Paula continues, explaining, “yeah, you were there. So, I raised my hand, and the teacher asked me if I had a question. So, I asked, ‘if we only use 10 percent of our brain, what 90 percent of it can we cut out?’ So, everyone in the class started laughing. Then, the teacher tried to explain his way out of it, and he couldn’t.”

Kathy comments, “so, 90 percent of the brain is superfluous.” Paula replies, “no. It’s verbose.” Kathy replies, “superfluous.” Continuing the verbal ping pong match, Paula replies, “verbose.” Karen asks, “what’s this all about?” Kathy replies, “seriously, girl. You don’t want to know.”

Knowing there is a story behind the story, Angela tells Kathy and Paula, “yeah, we do!” Paula laughs, and comments, “not this again!”

Kathy explains, “when we were in chemistry class in high school, on the lab handout there was a sentence that read, ‘credit will be deducted for both superfluous information and verbose detail.’” Paula comments, “notice how she remembers that word for word.” Kathy splashes Paula, and continues, “so, me and Paula were discussing whether the word ‘both’ in that sentence is superfluous or verbose. I thought it was superfluous because the word ‘both’ was totally unneeded. Paula thought the extra word in there made it verbose. So, Mr. Madre, the teacher heard us. So, we got in trouble, and Mr. Madre told us that, if we disrupt the class again, we’re both going to detention.” Angela laughs, and asks, “so, did you ever settle it?” Kathy replies, “yeah. It’s superfluous.” Paula splashes Kathy, and replies, “no, it’s not. It’s verbose.”

Mr. Frazier and Braden take a walk around the pool, talking about the 4 by 400-meter relay, the 400-meter dash, and a few other events. During their lengthy discussion, Mr. Frazier tells Braden, “with all that you guys have been through with Mr. Crum and Dean Grimsby, you are all to be commended. Those guys put every imaginable roadblock in your way. It’s nice to have no interference for once.” Braden replies, “now, all we have to do is get this guy’s ass out of the White House.” Mr. Frazier explains, “he’s not going to be reelected. First of all, no one in the athletic sphere will ever vote for him. And, with 18 percent interest rates, no one who has a credit card, needs a car loan, or wants to buy a house will ever vote for him.” Braden replies, “good. Because, even if we went to the White House to meet him, I don’t have anything good to say to him anyway.”

Braden mentions, “speaking about Mr. Crum, he ain’t doing too well.” Mr. Frazier asks, “what’s going on with Mr. Crum these days? Is he not enjoying his stay at the prison?” Braden replies, “he got his ass kicked really bad the other day. They had to ship his piece of shit ass off to the hospital.” Mr. Frazier opens his eyes wide, and asks, “really? What did he do?” Braden explains, “Mr. Crum still thinks he’s a school principal. A fight broke out, and he stepped in and tried to break it up. So, the two inmates who were fighting ganged up, and kicked the shit out of him. He’s trying to get brownie points for an early release.” Mr. Frazier replies, “he’d be better off just laying low.” Braden agrees, telling Mr. Frazier, “yeah. My father told me that Mr. Crum is a real pain in the ass. Mr. Crum is always complaining about something.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, “some things never change.”

Off to the side, Provost Leighton and Dr. Zunde, not seeing each other for a while, have a private conversation. After catching up on what they have been up to since the University’s division meet, Provost Leighton

asks Dr. Zunde, “Gerhard, so tell me. What’s your take on the boycott?” Dr. Zunde explains, “I generally like to stay politically neutral. But, in this case, I simply can’t. This is a serious problem.” Pointing to the men and women on the track team, Dr. Zunde continues, “these guys have put in an enormous amount of work to get where they are today. I’ve seen it over the years. And, to nullify all that work, and to toss all potential Olympiads aside, like trash, is an outright disgrace. This President has also ruined his chances for reelection, not that anyone would vote for him again, anyway. And, this close to the election, since he’s not going to be reelected anyway, what’s the point of his action? All it will do is to guarantee that the other party will win.” Provost Leighton agrees, replying, “I think we all share that sentiment.”

Provost Leighton asks, “so, how are things over at the high school?” Dr. Zunde replies, “over this past year, everything went back to being a little rough. The interim principal, Mr. Shapiro, is becoming another Mr. Crum. I’m sure that George has told you of his dealings with Mr. Crum.” Provost Leighton replies, “he has. I’m so sorry that you guys had to put up with him for so many years.” Dr. Zunde mentions, “I’m not sure if you know this or not, but, my cousin, Noreen Brooks, is the superintendent of schools. There’s a couple of changes coming along next year that will definitely work in our favor.” Provost Leighton replies, “that’s good news! Trust me. I know first hand how annoying interference from administrators can be.”

Provost Leighton and Dr. Zunde have quite a lengthy conversation, leaving a few members of the team wondering what they are discussing. Mr. Frazier comes over and joins in, raising more speculation of what is being discussed over in the coach’s corner. Waving over to Barbara and Johnson to join them, Dr. Zunde will let them in on the confidential good news that will be announced next year.

Later in the afternoon, Akinmola comes outside, and announces to everyone, “the 1,500 meters is going to be on soon!” Mitchell asks, “how soon?” Akinmola replies, “all they said, my friend, is that it’s coming up.” Everyone gets out of the pool, dries off, and heads inside.

All eyes are focused on the television as the 1,500 meter final is about to get underway. Seeing the athletes walking out on the track, Mitchell comments, “where’s their muscle?” Braden replies, “they ain’t got none. That’s half their problem.” Akinmola comments, “they’re anemic.” Karen, Kathy, and Paula suddenly laugh hysterically, prompting Akinmola to ask, “did I say something funny?” Paula tells Akinmola, “we’ll explain later, after the race.”

The runners are at the starting line, some of them bouncing up and down as if they were on a trampoline. Others appear as if they are

dancing out of step to the sound of the background noise in the stadium. With a sudden burst of energy, they all rush to the starting line, awaiting the gun. The gun is fired, and the runners have left in what appears to be a fast-paced jog. Braden asks, “when are they gonna start running?” Mitchell replies, “hopefully, sometime before the closing ceremony.”

During the first lap, Davidson comments, “if they were any closer, they could hug each other.” Mitchell mentions, “they’re all chicken shit. They’re all afraid to do anything.” Hearing the comments, Mr. Frazier announces, “do you see this? This is exactly why I always say that there are only two races run in track. The 100-meter dash, and the 400-meter dash! What you are watching is a 400-meter dash with an 1,100 meter warm-up! And, you can’t tell me that those guys are giving it their best! They’re not!”

Finally, two minutes into the race, one runner steps up the pace. The other runners quickly follow suit. The field begins to spread and, as Mr. Frazier previously announced, the last 400 meters is a sprint to the finish. Running in single file, everyone wonders whether any of the athletes will make a move. Coming around the final curve, the three front runners battle it out for the gold medal. Out of the curve, it is now a two-man race, which quickly turns into a one-man race. With the winning time of 3:38.40 displayed on the television, Mitchell gives Akinmola a high-five.

Mitchell’s best performance of 3:34.23 would have won the gold medal, and Akinmola’s best performance of 3:37.93 would have likely taken the silver medal. But, had Darryl Stone been in the race, it’s not likely today’s Olympic gold medalist would have been in the running. Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone would have strategically blocked their opponents, and swept the event as they’ve done many times in the past.

Standing in the back of the room, Mr. Frazier whispers to Provost Leighton and Dr. Karakova, “these guys deserve a whole lot better than a dinner at the White House. I wish I could do something for them, but nothing I do could even come close to them being on that track right now.” Provost Leighton replies, “I know what you mean, George. They’re all fired up because they could have won. But, that doesn’t hold a candle to actually winning.” Dr. Karakova mentions, “just between us, Eddie is really ticked off. I’m sure the rest of them feel the same way. They’re just not showing it.”

Now that the events are coming to a close, everyone heads outside to the pool to relax for a while. Tessa jumps in, getting in a few laps. Kathy mentions to Paula, “wow! We’ve had a two-week party, watching the Olympics, here and at your house. I’ve totally forgotten about our reunion at the county pool.” Paula suggests, “if we’re going to do that, we’d better set the date now since everyone’s all together.”

With only a short time left before school starts, Kathy and Paula set a date, and are glad that everyone is able to attend. As the evening comes to an end, everyone heads home, and will meet again at the county pool.

Since the Olympics have been over, Eddie has been spending a lot of time cleaning up around the service station. So far, over the past few weeks, Eddie has cleaned up the inside of the station, installed a hidden safe behind a movable wall in the private restroom, straightened up the office, and found a proper place for every tool. Finished with the inside of the service station, Eddie is now focusing on pressure washing the floors of the service bays and the outside of the station.

While pressure washing the service bays, Eddie looks around at his setup, thinking that the place now looks brand new. Looking out of the service area, Eddie recalls that, at this point in time, Eddie took his second trip through the portal, and saw the mechanic pressure washing the floor, as Eddie is doing now. Although he looks out toward the road several times, Eddie sees no sign of his younger counterpart coming from the past.

Once the inside is pressure washed, Eddie moves on to working on the outside. Pressure washing the parking lot will take a few days but, once it is done, the service station will look more presentable. The afternoon goes by quickly, still with no sign of Eddie coming from the past. As the sun begins to set, Eddie closes up for the day, gets into his MGB, and heads home.

Early during the next week, the sign, which reads “Eddie’s Service Station”, arrives, and is being installed by the sign company. Behind the service station, Mark is tying up a few loose ends regarding the storage building. Mark walks from behind the service station, and tells Eddie, “wow! It looks like everything’s about done.” Eddie replies, “yeah, bro! I’m in business. I wanted to get this all finished before Kathy starts teaching.” Mark mentions, “yeah. By then, we’ll be back on the track.” Eddie replies, “I can’t wait. The team is stronger than ever.” Once the sign has been installed, Eddie and Mark call it an early day, and head home.

When Eddie gets home, Kathy is in the back yard, relaxing by the pool. Walking up, Eddie tells Kathy, “I’ve been cleaning up the station for a few weeks, and I’m finally done.” Kathy exclaims, “great! So, are you going to reopen soon?” Eddie replies, “yeah. But, get this. I never came from the past. I distinctly remember coming to the future in August of this year. Everything happened just like it was supposed to, but I haven’t come from the past yet.” Kathy replies, “that’s kind of weird. But, you didn’t think that was going to happen.”

Eddie then explains, “oh, and get this! When I went through the portal to 1980, I asked my future self about the angles of the rocks in the portal, and he, or I, knew a lot about it. But, I am at that time now, and we know that the portal gets its power from the blue, yellow, and red stones. But, he didn’t know that back then.” Kathy replies, “that’s not too weird because, in that future, I probably wasn’t alive. So, you never went looking for any more stones.” Thinking for a moment, Eddie replies, “wow, Katarina! It sounds like you have it all figured out!”

Eddie then contends, “so, if I’m not coming from the past, now I’m wondering why I even bothered to put in the safe.” Kathy replies, “well, for two reasons that I can think of. One is that it is supposed to be there. And, the second is because you can keep money and gold in the safe, and go into the future and sell gold.” Eddie points out, “yeah. But, the portal is in our back yard.” Kathy tells Eddie, “so, tell Mark to make another marble portal, and install it behind the station. I think it would look really nice there.” Eddie thinks for a moment, and replies, “yeah. That should be easy enough. I’m definitely going to do that. Then, I can keep one of my bicycles at the station, and buy and sell gold after work.” After all, going into the future, dealing in gold and examining the future stock market pages is how Eddie makes his real money.

A week later, the tribe meets at the county pool for their annual reunion. The reunion also brings the annual 100-yard freestyle rematch between Tessa and Eddie. Tessa is faster than she’s ever been in the water. Eddie is making no comment this year about how he’s been training, which is worrying Tessa to no end. While she says it’s not really about the competition, Tessa has been taking this yearly rematch very seriously.

As the morning moves on, everyone trickles in a few at a time. This year, there are eight matching Dune Buggies in the parking lot. Eddie has decided to leave his Dune Buggy home, and ride with Kathy. Bobby B. and Erika arrive, with Erika driving Bobby B’s. Dune Buggy. And, ready for the 100-yard freestyle rematch, Tessa arrives with Hoffer in her white Dune Buggy. This year, Angela, from the radio station was invited to join the group.

Walking by Eddie’s table, Tessa puts her stuff down on an adjacent table, and greets Eddie, telling him, “you’re going down this year, buddy.” Eddie calmly replies, “oh, well,” leaving even greater uncertainty in Tessa’s mind about the current level of Eddie’s swimming skills. Looking around, Tessa searches for anyone who might tell her where Eddie stands. But, Tessa reasons to herself that, if Eddie doesn’t let on to her, then he likely hasn’t told anyone whether he expects to win this year or not.

Bobby B. takes a seat next to Mark and, all excited, tells him, “me and Erika found a lot for our house!” Mark looks at Bobby B. and asks, “oh, really?” Bobby B. replies, “yeah! The sale goes through next week! And then, we’re going to start building our house.” Mark tells Bobby B., “wow! It sounds like you’ll be really busy for a few months.” Beating around the bush, Bobby B. asks Mark, “do you think you’ll have time to help me?” Messing with Bobby B., Mark replies, “yeah. I suppose I can drive a few nails.”

Not quite the response he was expecting from Mark, Bobby B. asks, “where do I begin?” Mark replies, “buying the lot would be a good place to start.” Bobby B. asks, “then, what?”

Seeing that Bobby B. is getting worried, Mark laughs, and replies, “I’m messing with you. Yeah, I’ll build your house for you. Don’t worry about it. Just pick out the plans. I have a few plan books at home. Then, we’ll get a building permit.” Bobby B. is greatly relieved. Although he learned a lot about construction from Mark, Mark made all the major decisions, and Bobby B. was directed by Mark as to what to do.

At a nearby table, a few of the women are discussing life after college. During the conversation, Karen asks Angela, who has graduated and now works at a television station, “hey. How come the University’s radio station is off the air?” Angela explains, “I was wondering that too. So, this morning, when I was getting ready, I called. They said the really bad thunderstorm yesterday damaged the antenna. Not only ours, but a few other stations got hit. Since we’re a university, we’re on the bottom of the list for the tower guys to get out and look at it.” Karen, who listens to the campus radio station a lot, asks, “when will it be back on the air?” Angela replies, “they told me the tower guy can’t get out for at least a week or two. And, then he has to find out what the problem is.”

Kathy chimes in, half jokingly telling Angela, “I know a good tower guy.” Angela asks, “who’s that?” Kathy replies, “Eddie.” Angela exclaims, “that’s right! Eddie offered to climb the tower and change the light bulb once!” Eddie, at a nearby table, turns around, and asks Kathy, “what are you signing me up for this time, Katarina?” Kathy replies, “nothing. The campus radio station is off the air because the antenna got struck by lightning, and their tower guy can’t get out for a week or two. And, I was remembering about when you told Angela that you would climb the tower and change the bulb.” Eddie asks Kathy, “so, when am I climbing this tower?”

Angela looks at Kathy, discussing the situation between themselves. Kathy asks Eddie, “how about tomorrow morning?” Eddie replies, “sure.” Mark adds, “this sounds interesting. Can I come?” Eddie replies, “sure. If I drop something when I’m up on the tower, I’ll need someone to catch it.”

Angela walks over, giving Eddie and Mark a high-five, and tells them, "I'll let Tim, the chief engineer, know. I'm sure he'll be really happy to hear this!"

Eddie curiously asks Angela, "so, no one at the radio station can climb the tower?" Angela replies, "nope. No one there is physically fit enough. Most of the guys are a bunch of geeks. So, the station hires a tower maintenance company." So, tomorrow morning, the newly formed antenna crew will try to discover what went wrong causing the campus radio station to go off the air.

About an hour before lunch, Tessa is getting a bit nervous. Wanting to get the race over with, Tessa asks Eddie, "are you ready?" Eddie confidently replies, "whenever you are." Also quite confident, Tessa tells Eddie, "okay. Let's get this over with!" Imitating Tessa from last year, Eddie stands up, stretches his arms and, faking a yawn, tells Tessa, "okay. I think I'm awake enough. Let's go and get this over with. I'm getting hungry." Eddie then yells out to Kathy, "it's race time!"

Kathy walks over to Andrea, telling her that Eddie and Tessa are ready to race. Andrea, who graduated this year with a master's degree, is likely in her last Summer of being a lifeguard at the county pool. Sherri, the other lifeguard on duty today, is still in college and will likely be the head lifeguard next year.

With no one else racing this year, Eddie and Tessa get warmed up as Andrea blows her whistle, announcing that the pool will be closed for ten minutes. The pool slowly clears out as the tribe moves to the pool's edge, since everyone wants a good view of the race. Clearing the pool takes a while, with some of the younger kids whining like their universe is coming to an abrupt end.

Andrea, the lifeguard, tells everyone to get ready. Eddie takes lane three and Tessa takes lane four. Walking along the edge of the pool, Sherri keeps the spectators back three feet from the pool's edge. Andrea asks Eddie and Tessa if they are ready. They both indicate they are, and Andrea walks to the side of the pool, ready to start the race.

Andrea announces, "take your mark." With everyone in position, Andrea blows her whistle, starting the race. Eddie and Tessa dive in with ferocity, each not knowing what the other has under the hood. Both swimmers get off to a strong start in what looks to be a performance beyond what everyone expected. Kathy mentions to Paula, "Eddie thinks he's going to win this year." Paula replies, "they're halfway through the first lap, and he's ahead." At the wall first is Eddie, whose performance today is telling Tessa she needs to crank it up a notch or two.

During the second lap of the four-lap race, Angela tells Kathy, "I feel like I should be calling the play by play!" Kathy asks, "how is the job coming?" Angela replies, "great! I thought I would be stuck doing the evening news, but they put me on the sports coverage team. So, when the football season starts, I'll be down on the field!" Kathy gives Angela a high-five, telling her, "awesome, girl!" Angela replies, "I had no idea I wanted to be a sportscaster until I worked the divisional meet last Spring." As Eddie completes his second flip turn, Kathy mentions, "it looks like Eddie is still ahead." Tessa touches the wall second, and is not the least bit happy.

Barbara walks over to Kathy, and casually mentions, "Eddie changed his stroke." Kathy explains, "yeah, he did. He had me time him in our pool a few times. He changed his stroke a little to use a few more of his muscles." Barbara observes, "it looks like a perfectly legal freestyle stroke. I can see exactly what he's doing differently. When Tessa finds out, she's going to get herself into a tizzy." Kathy replies, "Eddie will tell her about it after the race is over." At the end of the third lap, Tessa makes up a little ground, but not enough to worry Eddie. With Eddie having a greater than usual lead, Tessa has a lot of work ahead of her in the final lap.

Early in the last lap, Eddie still maintains the lead. Tessa gains slowly on Eddie as the end of the race draws near, but it's difficult to tell whether Eddie is taking it easy or Tessa has a second wind. With all eyes on the finish, everyone cheers as Eddie approaches the wall and touches first. Beating Tessa by more than five yards, Eddie is this year's clear winner.

Barbara announces, "the winner this year is Eddie!" In the pool, Tessa gives Eddie a high-five, exclaiming, "out with it! You have more secrets, buddy, and I want to hear them!" Eddie tells Tessa, "after lunch. I'm hungry." Eddie and Tessa get out of the pool, and join the others who are heading toward the concession stand.

Over lunch, Tessa asks Eddie, "so, what's different this year?" Eddie explains, "I changed the way I do my stroke. I have my arms out a little farther from my body. This way, when I make the stroke, I can use my lats more, and I can also use my obliques by contracting that side of my body." Barbara reassures Tessa, "I was watching Eddie. His modified freestyle stroke is fully legal." Eddie adds, "the front crawl with a flutter kick is generally accepted as the freestyle stroke. But, as long as it's clearly not a butterfly, breaststroke, or any variation of a backstroke, technically anything would be considered a freestyle. So, Kathy timed me in the pool using a few different variations to the stroke. I got it down to a science. Oh, and I was still training in my clothes, to create drag in the water." Tessa tells Eddie, "you'll have to show me." Eddie replies, "sure.

But, my variation may not give you any additional speed in the water. It will depend on how strong your other muscles are.”

Over lunch, Mark whispers to Eddie that the stone yard has cut the marble slab for the portal behind the service station, and that it is ready for installation. Eddie tells Mark to bring it by anytime, and they’ll install it. Eddie also mentions to Mark that, for the time being, the storage building behind the service station will be a gym.

Erika mentions to Eddie that she wants a Dune Buggy. Eddie tells Erika that he’ll build her one but, between her and Bobby B., they have a Dune Buggy and two motorcycles, neither of which are practical in the Winter nor when it’s raining out. Tessa takes Eddie’s advice, and will drive Bobby B’s. Dune Buggy a bit more.

While everyone is together, Johnson tells everyone, “I have an announcement to make!” Already knowing what Johnson is going to announce, Barbara smiles. Everyone gets quiet, and Johnson announces, “I got a job teaching physical education at the high school! And, I’m going to be the assistant track coach!” Cheers and clapping break out, catching the attention of everyone at the pool. Eddie sits back, thinking about one of his trips to the future when the chiropractor who supplies Eddie’s vitamins once made reference to Coach Johnson. Eddie clearly sees the future falling into place, with a few slight modifications.

After lunch, Kathy tells Karen, “you’ve been really quiet today. What’s up?” Karen replies, “nothing really.” Kathy, perceiving something is wrong, tells Karen, “something’s up, girl. If you want to talk about it, let me know.” A tear falls from Karen’s eye, and she tells Kathy, “can we go for a walk?” Kathy replies, “sure,” and Kathy and Karen walk to the other side of the pool where they can be alone.

Seeing Karen is upset, Kathy asks, “so, what’s up?” Karen explains, “I took Biology 202 this past semester.” Kathy interjects, “yeah. Genetics and Molecular Biology, and that sort of stuff.” Karen continues, “yeah. And, the professor went over blood types. My mother has blood type AB negative, so they’re always asking her to donate.” Karen starts crying and, through her tears, tells Kathy, “mine is type O!” Knowing what this means, Kathy gives Karen a hug, whispering to her, “oh, hon. I’m so, so sorry.”

Once Karen composes herself, Kathy then asks, “are you sure yours is type O?” Karen replies, “yeah. I always knew it was. Then, in biology lab, we typed our own blood, and mine was definitely type O.” Kathy suggests, “maybe, your mother’s blood type isn’t type AB.” Karen replies, “it is. They’re always asking her to donate. Once, she was even called in on Christmas Eve one year for an emergency.” Kathy reiterates, “I am so

sorry.” Karen replies, “now, I’m wondering who my biological parents are.” Kathy replies, “ask your mother. She would know.” Karen replies, “someday, I’m going to do that.”

Karen then explains, “at least, now I know why she always hated me. I’m either hers by someone else, or I was adopted. Or, maybe I was switched at birth. I hope I was adopted.” Kathy comments, “that would definitely explain a lot.” Kathy then asks, “how much older than you are your brothers?” Karen replies, “one is three years older than me, and the other one is one year older than me.” Kathy sighs, and tells Karen, “well, they probably wouldn’t know anything. They would be one and three years old at that time. Kids that age think the stork delivers babies.” Karen replies, “I’m guessing the stork brought me.”

Karen tells Kathy, “I need a really big favor.” Kathy asks, “what’s that?” Karen explains, “when I go home, and ask my mother for an explanation, she’s going to blow up. Will you please come with me?” Kathy replies, “sure. No problem.” Karen tells Kathy, “thank you. If someone else is there with me, she doesn’t dare explode like she usually does. She’s like a nuclear weapon with a short fuse.” Kathy replies, “yeah. I’ve kind of seen that.” Kathy and Karen talk for a while longer, then rejoin the group, walking into the middle of Braden telling a story from the police academy.

With Kathy and Karen walking up, Eddie tells Braden, “yo, bro! Start over,” so that Kathy and Karen can hear the story. Starting from the beginning, Braden explains, “when I was at the police academy, in one of our classes, the instructor was going over what to look for in a crowd situation that could pose a problem. He said that certain red flags would be evident and, if we see any red flags, we should pay close attention to those people. So, one of the recruits raised his hand, and asked, ‘when we see these red flags, where will they be? Will they be hiding them in their pockets, or will they be holding them out in the open?’” Everyone at the tables laughs hysterically, not believing that anyone can be that dumb.

Johnson comments, “no one can be that stupid!” Braden exclaims, “oh yeah, they can! This guy was! Lucky for all of us, he didn’t make it. His ass was dumber than the Chuckie!” Mark comments, “well, I’m glad he didn’t make it.” Paula replies, “yeah. If he did make it, you’d probably carry a big supply of red flags in your truck just to mess with him.” Mark laughs, and tells Paula, “yeah. You never know when you need to mark underground utilities.”

Returning the subject of the dumb recruit, Johnson asks, “did he get kicked out, or did he fail?” Braden replies, “he failed. But, they did kick another guy out.” Johnson asks, “why did the other guy get kicked out?” Braden explains, “he had a really shitty attitude. He was always asking

questions like, ‘how much does an officer make?’ or ‘what’s a detective’s salary?’ The commander told him, ‘son, if money is your only goal, you’re in the wrong place! A police officer’s duty is to protect and serve!’ The commander explained to us, ‘to become a police officer is a calling, not a job. A job is something you choose. A calling is something God chooses for you to do.’ So, the commander kicked that guy’s ass out of the academy, and told him to go get a job washing police cars.” Mark laughs, repeating, “that’s kind of funny. Washing police cars.”

Mark glances over toward the other end of the pool, and comments, “talking about red flags, three red flags are over near the concession stand.” Eddie asks, “what are they doing here?” Mark replies, “I don’t know. I’m surprised they’re still alive.” Braden comments, “maybe they’re here for their annual ass kicking.” Chuckie, Donna Harmon, and Terry Haynes disappear from view, prompting a few members of the tribe to occasionally glance over behind the restroom building, warding off a potential sneak attack.

Braden continues talking about the police academy, explaining, “when we were at the shooting range, one recruit came up and.” Suddenly interrupting himself, Braden exclaims, “something’s going down over there!” Braden jumps up out of his seat, and runs over to the concession area, followed by Bobby B. just in case Chuckie needs to be dumped into a dumpster.

Before Braden arrives at the scene, Erika, who was waiting in line at the concession stand to get a drink, carries Haynes on her back, and dumps her into the pool. Going back for more trash, Erika drags Donna Harmon along the concrete, also dumping her in the pool. Perceiving that neither Haynes nor Harmon entered the pool voluntarily, Andrea blows her whistle, and tells everyone to get out of the pool. With Erika having the situation under control, Braden and Bobby B. let her finish her business.

The crowd stands back, as Erika heads straight on for Chuckie. Placing Chuckie into an arm lock, Erika guides Chuckie toward the deep end of the pool, followed by Braden and Bobby B. Chuckie screams out, “someone, stop her! Help! Someone, stop her!” No one dares to come to Chuckie’s aid. At the deep end of the pool near the tribe’s tables, Erika kicks the shit out of Chuckie as the tribe sits back, watching the entertainment. After suffering many solid blows, Erika takes Chuckie down. Mark comments, “that was a good two-point takedown.” Had this been an actual wrestling match, the referee would have stopped the competition by now.

Once Erika as decided that Chuckie has had enough, Erika lifts Chuckie off the ground, and tosses him into the deep end of the pool.

Mark yells out to Chuckie, “hey, junior! The pool’s closed! Didn’t you hear the lifeguard?” Sherri runs over, diving into the deep end to save Chuckie, who cannot swim. Mark mentions to Eddie, “well, this afternoon didn’t go exactly as planned.” Eddie replies, “yeah. I’d go and help out Erika, but it looks like she has everything under control.” Erika runs back over to the shallow end, prompting Mark to tell Eddie, “I’m going to see what’s going on over there.” Mark and Eddie follow Erika, followed by a few others.

At the shallow end, Andrea just pulled Haynes out of the water. Erika lifts Haynes off the ground, finishing the job she started earlier. Eddie exclaims, “wow! Erika is really taking care of business today! I wonder what happened.” Mark replies, “and, it doesn’t look like she’s stopping.” Seeing Haynes now donating blood to the environment, Andrea yells out to Erika, “please don’t throw her back in the pool! She’s bleeding.” For some reason, Andrea does not care that Erika is relentlessly kicking the shit out of Haynes. Andrea just does not want Haynes’ blood in the pool, which would cause her to close the pool until it is safe to reopen. Once Erika is finished with Haynes, she moves on to kicking the shit out of Donna Harmon. Bobby B. stands by, making sure no harm comes to Erika.

Meanwhile, Braden is having a conversation with Andrea, attempting to find out exactly what happened. Daria, one of the concession stand attendants, joins in the discussion and, referring to Haynes, explains, “the one laying on the ground pulled a gun on the girl kicking the shit out of everyone.” Shocked and surprised, Braden interrupts and asks, “where’s the gun now?” Daria replies, “the girl that’s kicking the shit out of everyone took the gun away from her, and threw it on the roof. It all happened so fast.” Braden, looking on the roof of the concession stand and, seeing the gun, is relieved that there is not a loaded weapon laying around.

Pointing to Erika, Braden tells Daria, “by the way, that’s Erika who’s taking care of business.” Braden then asks Daria, “what happened next?” Daria replies, “Erika went berserk.” Stating the obvious, Braden comments, “and, it looks like to me that she ain’t done yet.” Andrea tells Braden, “one of the other employees called the police.” Braden replies, “good.” Andrea whispers to Braden, “considering what happened, I’m just letting them fight.” Giving Andrea some words of wisdom, Braden whispers back, “yeah. You don’t want to get in the middle of that one. Someone might get hurt. Breaking up that kind of ass kicking is way above your pay grade.”

Once Erika is finished taking apart Donna Harmon, she walks back to the tables, where Chuckie is laying on the ground. Erika takes a seat with the tribe, where everyone asks her, “what happened?” Erika explains, “Haynes pointed a gun at me, and told me, ‘you’re coming with us.’ So, I

disarmed her, threw her gun on the roof, and threw her and that other bitch in the pool. Then, I kicked the shit out of the Chuckie. And then, I went back and finished the other two off.”

Chuckie, who cannot swim, finally finds the energy to stand up and, seeing the tribe, attempts to get out of the immediate area. Erika gets out of her seat, and forcefully kicks Chuckie back into the water, causing Sherri to get back to work. Mark again yells out to Chuckie, “yo, junior! Didn’t you hear the lifeguard? The pool’s closed!” Erika takes her seat again, continuing her explanation of what happened.

Braden walks back to the tables from the concession area, and announces, “those two don’t look too good. Haynes is still out, and her hand looks all mangled up!” Hearing the news, Barbara, a certified CPR instructor, walks over to the shallow end to investigate. As Sherri tows Chuckie to the shallow end, Eddie comments, “the Chuckie doesn’t look too good either. He’s crying like a baby.” Hoffer mentions, “the lifeguard had a hard time getting the Chuckie out of the pool. We had to help her.” And, after helping Sherri get Chuckie out of the water, Andrea reopens the pool.

Erika asks Braden, “am I in trouble?” Braden laughs, and replies, “not if they pointed a gun at you! Their asses are the ones that are in trouble!” Erika is relieved, thinking that she perhaps went a bit too far kicking the shit out of her three adversaries. Erika sits back and relaxes, looking over the carnage she left behind.

The police arrive at the scene. Erika is glad to see that Officer Richard Hayes has taken the call. Driving up behind Officer Hayes today is Officer Daniel Wilson. Evaluating the situation, Officer Wilson radios for an ambulance. Officer Hayes speaks with Andrea, who brings Daria into the conversation, getting an understanding of what happened. Hearing that Erika is involved and a gun was also involved, Officer Hayes instructs Officer Wilson to get in touch with Captain Gabriel.

Officer Hayes walks over to the tables where the tribe is seated, seeing the familiar crowd. Calling Erika and Braden aside, Officer Hayes gets their statements. Erika is quite relieved to know that her father is on the way. Informed that a gun was involved, Officer Hayes, Braden, and Erika walk back to the concession area, where Haynes still has not regained consciousness.

Seeing the gun on the roof, Officer Hayes asks the person behind the concession stand, “is there a ladder around somewhere?” The attendant replies, “not that I know of.” Braden tells Officer Hayes, “I can get the gun down.” Braden retrieves the rescue hook from the fence, which is on a very long pole. Placing the hook behind the gun, Braden slowly slides the

gun to the edge of the roof. With the gun just beyond Officer Hayes' reach, Braden gets a chair from a nearby table. Standing on the chair, Officer Hayes retrieves the gun. Taking a look at the gun, Braden exclaims, "that's a forty-five!" Holding the gun by the barrel, Officer Hayes tells Braden, "from the weight of it, I'd say it's fully loaded. But, it's locked out<sup>3</sup>. Well, this one is going to put these characters away for a very long time." Erika is certainly glad to hear that, and so is Braden.

Two ambulances arrive, and the paramedics attend to Chuckie, Haynes, and Harmon. Officer Hayes informs the paramedics that Haynes is under arrest. Haynes, who is still unconscious, is placed on a stretcher, and transported to the hospital. Officer Hayes places Harmon and Chuckie under arrest, and they are also transported to the hospital. Once they are released from the hospital, they'll all be transported to jail.

Captain Gabriel arrives, and is briefed by Officer Hayes of the situation. Calling Erika over, Captain Gabriel, Erika's father, asks her, "what happened?" Erika explains, "Haynes pointed a gun at me, and she told me, 'you're coming with us.' So, I disarmed her, and kicked the shit out of all of them. And, I made sure that bitch can never fire a gun for the rest of her life." Captain Gabriel is certainly glad to see that Erika can protect herself, for he taught her well. Hearing that Haynes was armed, Captain Gabriel tells Officer Hayes, "make sure this one is well documented. I want those three put away for the maximum."

Officers Hayes and Wilson get everyone's statements, making an airtight case against Haynes and her accomplices. The police department clearly wants Haynes, Chuckie, and Harmon off the street for many reasons. Now, with a felony charge against Haynes, Chuckie, and Harmon, the police finally have a chance to accomplish that goal. Captain Gabriel, who is not on duty today, stays for a while, and enjoys a slice of pizza with the tribe.

The disruptions of the afternoon do not get in the way of this year's cannonball contest, which Bobby B. has been waiting for. Captain Gabriel stays around for the competition, wanting to see his future son-in-law in action. This year's contestants are Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. Suffering a loss last year to Braden, Bobby B. is out to regain his title of the cannonball king.

Before they start, Mark asks Bobby B., "so, still no rules, bro?" Bobby B. replies, "no rules. And, this year, I'm going to win." Mark reminds Bobby B., "that's what you said last year." Bobby B. replies, "yeah, but I

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<sup>3</sup> Locked out: The gun's safety is engaged, and therefore cannot be fired.

weigh more this year, and I have a method.” As in previous years, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara will be the judges, and get into position.

Bobby B. announces, “I’m going first!” Heading to the diving board, Bobby B. has apparently been exploring new techniques. Taking a few check bounces, Bobby B. carefully plans his trajectory and landing point. Distracting Bobby B., Mark yells out, “hey! That diving board only holds 300 pounds!” Bobby B., however, is not phased in the least by Mark’s comment.

Using the same strategy as Braden did last year, Bobby B. takes three bounces on the diving board and, getting as much altitude as he can, takes off toward the edge of the pool. With a great landing in the water, Bobby B.’s splash goes quite far. Standing in the midst of the tables where the tribe is seated, Kathy announces, “the splash went all the way to here!” Akinmola attests to Bobby B.’s skill, announcing, “that was a good one! I got wet!” Bobby B. comes out of the water, confident that, this year, he won.

Eddie goes second and, like last year, decides to use the diving board technique. Eddie reasons that, if he is to beat Bobby B., he must get more altitude off the diving board. Eddie takes four bounces, getting as much altitude as he can. Taking off toward the edge of the pool, Eddie enters the pool at an angle, making a huge splash toward the tables. Kathy gets wet, searching for the farthest splash. Kathy and Barbara stand at the point of Eddie’s farthest splash. Barbara announces, “on my side, Bobby B. is still in first place.” Kathy finds Eddie’s farthest splash, and announces, “same here! Bobby B. is in first place.”

Mark goes third. Using the running technique this year, Mark gets a running start. With more speed, Mark is able to land into the water with more force. Mark flies through the air, and enters the pool on a shallow angle. This year, Mark’s splash goes farther than expected. Searching for the farthest splash from the pool’s edge, Paula announces, “the splash made it to here!” After a discussion among the judges, Mark is in second place.

Using the technique he used last year, Braden gets on the diving board, ready to defend his title. Braden takes three bounces and, leaving the diving board, lands close to the edge of the pool. Making a huge splash, Braden wonders whether he won. When Braden emerges, he hears Kathy announcing, “Bobby B.’s splash went farther.”

After a short discussion among the judges, Barbara announces, “this year, Bobby B. is the winner! Mark came in second place. Braden came in third place. And, Eddie came in fourth place.” Regaining his title, Bobby B. receives high-fives, congratulations, and a slice of pizza. Seeing that

Mark actually beat him using a different technique, Eddie decides to revise his technique for next year.

As the afternoon winds down, everyone heads to the pizzeria. On the way, Kathy tells Eddie, "it's kind of weird how Chuckie seems to always know where to find us. It's like he's stalking our group, or something." Eddie replies, "yeah. This is no longer coincidental." Kathy sighs, and mentions, "well, at least those three assholes are out of commission for a while."

Bright and early the next day, Eddie, Kathy, Mark and Paula head to the campus radio station. Tim, who will be a senior at the University this upcoming year, and chief engineer of the radio station, is waiting with Angela. When Eddie and his newly formed tower crew arrive, Angela introduces them to Tim.

Following introductions, Angela tells Tim, "these guys are all track athletes. They want to have a race to the top of the tower. So, I told them it was okay." Tim laughs, telling Angela, "I know you. You're not getting me with that one!" Kathy tells Tim, "she's serious! We want to have a race to the top. And, I'm going to win!" Now looking worried, Tim replies, "that's way too dangerous!" Knowing exactly what Kathy is up to, Paula comments, "darn. We never get to have any fun." In a serious tone, Tim informs Angela, "I can't allow them to race up the tower!" Angela laughs, telling Kathy and Paula, "wow! We triple teamed him, and got him good!" Tim sighs, and comments, "some things never change. She's been at this for as long as I can remember."

Tim gathers the equipment, and they head to the roof of the building where the antenna tower is located. Since Eddie does not know exactly what he is looking for, Tim explains, "there are eight bays to the antenna. I suspect lightning hit one of them because the SWR<sup>4</sup> is 1.4 to 1. It should be 1.05 to 1 or less. So, I'm guessing something up there got hit by lightning. If you can find out which bay is the problem, then you can disconnect the coaxial cable and unbolt it and lower it down. Then, we can send it off to get repaired." Eddie asks, "how would I know if there is a problem?" Tim replies, "if lightning hit something up there, it will look like a real shitty arc welding job. You can't miss it. And, check the coax cables. If they got hit, the outer jacket will be melted." Eddie replies, "got it."

Angela asks Tim, "how long would it take to fix it?" Tim replies, "probably about a month." Angela asks, "so, you'll be off the air for a

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<sup>4</sup> SWR: Standing Wave Ratio. A measure of impedance matching between the antenna and the transmission line.

whole month?” Tim replies, “no. If a bay is damaged, we can run at reduced power. But, Eddie would have to disconnect four of the bays from the power divider to keep the load balanced.” Mark comments, “this all sounds complicated.” Angela tells Mark, “I suppose that’s why Tim is the chief engineer.”

After some detailed instruction, Eddie begins climbing the antenna tower. With two safety harnesses on, Eddie takes two steps up the tower, moves one D-Ring up two rungs, then moves the other D-Ring up two rungs. The fastest man in the world is climbing an antenna tower at about ten feet per minute. Ten feet per minute would be equivalent to a 30-minute 100-yard dash, about the top speed of Chuckie after Erika took care of him yesterday.

Arriving at the first antenna bay, Eddie examines it, and yells down, “I can’t see anything wrong with this one.” Tim yells back, “good. Lightning would most likely hit one of the top bays. The problem is probably at the top.” Looking far up the tower, Eddie yells back, “thanks.” Climbing higher, Eddie finds no problems with the second, third, or fourth bays of the antenna either.

On his way to the fifth bay, Eddie yells down, “I found your problem!” Tim asks, “what’s that?” Eddie yells back, “this big thing, whatever it is, is all melted on the top, and it has a hole in it.” Tim mumbles under his breath, “shit. That’s the power divider.” Having the power divider hit by lightning is a worst case scenario. The custom-made power divider is the most expensive item on the antenna tower.

Knowing that the power divider has to come down, Tim yells up at Eddie, “do you think you can remove it?” Eddie replies, “yeah.” Tim yells out, instructing Eddie, “okay! Clamp the pulley onto the tower, and we’ll send the tools up to you. In the meantime, start disconnecting all the cables.” Eddie disconnects the coaxial cables and Heliac transmission line as he awaits the arrival of his tools.

Ten minutes later, Eddie attaches the power divider to the rope, and the power divider is lowered down. Tim tells Eddie to leave the pulley attached to the tower, since the power divider will have to be reinstalled at a later date. Eddie descends the tower, not much faster than he climbed it. Arriving at the base of the tower, Eddie announces, “that was an easy workout.”

Announcing the bad news, Tim explains to everyone, “this is the problem, all right. Lightning hit the power divider. And, it’s a worse case scenario. We’ll be running at low power for a month.” Mark examines the power divider and asks, “why? This seems like it would be easy to fix.” Eddie takes a closer look, and confidently replies, “yeah. I can have this

fixed in an hour.” The sixteen-inch removable aluminum plate at the top of the power divider, which got hit by lightning, has an irregular hole in it, which allowed rain to enter. Tim asks Eddie, “you can?” Eddie replies, “yeah. Let’s take it over to the shop, and I’ll fix it.” With nothing to lose, Tim gathers a few spare connectors, a soldering iron, and a few other items in the event that something inside needs to be repaired. The group heads to Eddie’s Service Station, where the master mechanic will attempt to repair something he knows absolutely nothing about.

At the service station, Eddie removes the aluminum top to the power divider. Finding a piece of aluminum in the shop, Eddie and Kathy machine a new part, as Tim examines the inside of the power divider. Tim finds the inside of the power divider was splattered with molten aluminum when lightning struck it. With a cutting wheel, Mark carefully cleans out the inside of the power divider, removing the blemishes, restoring it to factory specifications. Tim is quite amazed that Eddie and Mark make repairing the power divider look so easy.

Paula tells Tim, “your in trouble now. Kathy’s working, and she doesn’t work free.” Tim asks, “really? How much does Kathy charge?” Paula replies, “a pizza. This is definitely going to cost you a pizza. And, there ain’t no way you’re getting out of it.” Tim thinks to himself that, if Eddie can repair the power divider, a pizza is a small price to pay. And besides, the pizza would come out of the radio station’s budget, so Tim doesn’t really care.

In twenty minutes, Eddie and Kathy have the new part completed. Eddie and Tim reassemble the power divider and, five minutes later, it’s ready to be reinstalled. Tim hesitantly asks Eddie, “is there any chance that I can get you to reinstall it?” Eddie replies, “sure. No problem.” Kathy adds, “you can install it after lunch. It’s pizza time!” Paula looks at Tim and mentions, “see that? What did I tell you?” Kathy asks Paula, “see what?” Paula explains, “when you guys were running that machine over there, I told Tim that you were working, so it’s going to cost him a pizza.” Kathy smiles and laughs, replying, “well, it’s lunchtime!” The group heads out to the pizzeria for lunch before they return to the University to finish the repairs.

After lunch, the first order of business is to get the radio station back on the air. Eddie climbs the tower again, reinstalls the power divider, and makes the long trek back down the tower. When he gets down from the tower, Eddie asks Tim, “how much does that part cost, anyway?” Tim replies, “about five thousand dollars. It was custom made for our frequency and antenna configuration.” Eddie replies, “wow! I’m glad I didn’t drop it.”

The group heads inside, where Tim will attempt to turn on the transmitter. Walking into the transmitter room, Angela explains to the tower crew, “this large cabinet, with all the switches and meters, is our transmitter.”

As Tim flips a circuit breaker on the front panel, causing the transmitter to come to life, Karen comments, “Tim is secretly hoping that the transmitter won’t blow up when he turns it on.” As he is pressing the button labeled “Filaments”, Tim laughs, and tells the group, “don’t listen to her. She’s messing with you again.” Karen replies, “don’t listen to him. There’s always a first time for everything, and who knows what else the lightning did.” Waiting for the tubes to warm up, Tim assures everyone, “trust me. Nothing is going to blow up.” Everyone knows by now that Angela, like Mark, is a master of messing with people.

After a few minutes, Tim presses the button labeled “Plates”, which powers up the transmitter. Looking at the meters, Tim comments, “well that looks good.” Tim tells Angela, “turn on the exciter<sup>5</sup>, and let’s see what happens.” Angela walks over to the exciter, and Tim whispers to the tower crew, “I’m going to get her good. Don’t get scared.” Tim watches the meters carefully and, as Angela turns on the exciter, Tim, as loud as he can, yells out, “pow!” Suddenly startled, Angela jumps back, quickly knowing that Tim got her, and got her good. Angela tells Tim, “okay. You won this one!”

Kathy asks, “so, is the station back on the air?” Tim replies, “yeah. The SWR is back to 1.04 to 1, and the plate voltage and current are where they’re supposed to be. And, the transmitter didn’t blow up. That’s always a good sign. Thank you guys so much! I can’t tell you how much I appreciate this.”

Angela asks Tim, “do you want me to sign us on?” Tim replies, “sure. And, now that we’re back on the air, I’ll see who can get over here to man the station.” Kathy interjects, “I can sign us on!” Angela, knowing exactly where this is going, tells Kathy, “that’s right! You can sign us on! Let’s do this!” As everyone walks into the main part of the radio station, Tim wonders what Angela and Kathy are up to.

Tim powers up the automation equipment and, knowing that no one is listening to a radio station that has been off the air for two days, tells Angela, “you guys can go ahead and sign us on now.” Tim makes a few

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<sup>5</sup> Exciter: The low-power RF stage of a radio transmitter where the audio is applied to the signal. Often a separate component.

phone calls, trying to find someone to come down to the station and work the afternoon shift.

Angela and the tower crew head to the studio. Angela tells Kathy, “okay. You can sign us on now.” Kathy sits behind the console and, recalling what she learned when Braden had his interview with Angela, pushes the button labeled “AIR”. Angela tells Kathy, “wow! Awesome! You found the magic button!” Mark, Eddie, and Paula stand aside, watching as Kathy figures out what to do next.

Giving Kathy a little help, Angela instructs Kathy, “push the button labeled ‘IN’ on the input labeled ‘MIC 1’, and then announce our call letters, and the city.” Kathy pushes the button and, as instructed, announces the University radio station’s call letters, and the city. Angela gives her a thumbs up, and whispers, “good! We’re signed on. Now, talk to everyone.”

Kathy announces, “good afternoon, everyone. We are back on the air. Lightning hit the antenna tower two days ago, and damaged the power divider. We spent the whole morning repairing the power divider, and we just got it working again. And, now I have absolutely no idea which button to press next, so I’m going to keep pressing buttons until I hear some music!” Angela giggles, and tells Kathy, “push the button labeled ‘AUTOMATION’. It’s next to the one labeled ‘AIR’.” Kathy pushes the button, switching control back to the automation equipment. Hearing music start to play through the open door, Kathy exclaims, “awesome! It worked.” Angela tells Kathy, “that was really great!”

Angela and the tower crew walk out to the main part of the radio station, where Tim is entering information into the official station log. Angela asks Tim, “did you find anyone to work?” Tim replies, “yeah. Pat is on her way. It’s her shift anyway. She can spend the afternoon calling everyone, and let them know we’re back on the air.”

Tim again thanks Eddie and his tower crew, also informing them, “if you guys didn’t fix the power divider for us, we’d be running ten watts out of one bay for a month. That signal would barely make it off campus. That would be really terrible, since classes start soon.” Curiously, Angela asks, “how would you do that?” Tim explains, “the exciter puts out ten watts. We can run off the exciter alone, and transmit from one bay. All it would take is running a coaxial cable from the exciter to the bay.” Angela announces, “and, ladies and gentleman, that’s why Tim is our chief engineer!” Eddie tells Tim, “if you need any more work done, call me.” Tim replies, “I might just take you up on that.” As Tim awaits Pat’s arrival, everyone else heads out for the afternoon.

Shortly after the annual get-together at the pool, Bobby B. begins working at Eddie's Service Station. Driving in on his BSA Starfire motorcycle, Bobby B. is ready to expand his horizons. Learning a lot from Mark, Bobby B. is ready to explore being an auto mechanic. Opening a little early on Bobby B's. first day, Eddie shows him around the station, explaining what he will be doing.

Mid morning, Eddie is working on an engine, and Bobby B. is doing an oil change. Eddie yells out to Bobby B., "here comes trouble." Bobby B. looks out toward the pumps, as Eddie explains, "that's Jimmy O'Brien. The car he's driving is the McCrutchen of automobiles." Bobby B. replies, "I'll go see what he wants." Eddie explains, "he wants his tank filled, and he's going to ask you about a half-dozen things that are wrong with that piece of shit. And, then he's not going to want anything fixed because it's too expensive." Bobby B. laughs, commenting, "this should be fun."

As Bobby B. walks up, O'Brien demands, "fill it up with regular." Bobby B. smiles, and replies, "sure thing." As his tank is being filled, O'Brien asks, "hey, don't I know you?" Bobby B. replies, "yeah. You went to Northside." O'Brien asks, "can you check my oil, too?" Bobby B. replies to O'Brien, "sure. I can do that. No problem."

Bobby B. pops the hood, and checks the oil. Not quite sure of himself, Bobby B. repeats the procedure, and checks the oil again. Seeing the same result, Bobby B. tells O'Brien, "you're down at least two quarts. That's not good." O'Brien tells Bobby B., "go ahead and fill it up with oil too." Bobby B. adds two quarts, and rechecks the level. Adding another half-quart, Bobby B. informs O'Brien, "you were down two and a half quarts. You might want to have Eddie take a look at your engine." O'Brien walks up to the service bays, telling Eddie, "hey. Can you come look at something for me?" Eddie replies, "yeah. In a minute."

Wondering what today's problem is, Eddie walks outside and asks, "what's up?" Bobby B. explains, "he was down two and a half quarts of oil." Eddie replies, "and, there'll be a half a quart on the ground under his car when he starts his engine. The rear engine seal is leaking badly." Looking under the hood, Eddie tells O'Brien, "you really should replace that battery. One of these days it's not going to start."

Eddie then asks O'Brien, "did Jake take a look at it?" O'Brien replies, "yeah. He told me to sell my car for scrap metal. I think he was jerking me around." Eddie tells O'Brien, "look. I can fix it, but you have some serious stuff going on here." O'Brien asks, "can you give me an estimate?" Pointing to the first service bay, Eddie replies, "sure. Pull it in front of that bay." O'Brien hands the money for his gas over to Bobby B., and gets in his car.

O'Brien turns the key to start his engine. O'Brien's car, however, does not start. Not at all surprised, O'Brien tells Bobby B., "it won't start." Bobby B. tells O'Brien, "turn on your headlights." O'Brien turns on his headlights, prompting Bobby B. to inform him, "wow! Your headlights put out about as much light as a nightlight. That's not good." Bobby B. opens the hood, and looks at the inside of the battery. Giving O'Brien more bad news, Bobby B. informs him, "your battery needs water, and your plates are warped. You need a new battery." O'Brien replies, "I don't have the money right now." Bobby B. adds some water to the battery, hoping that will solve O'Brien's immediate problem.

While Bobby B. is servicing O'Brien's battery, O'Brien asks Bobby B., "how much does it cost to rotate the tires?" Bobby B. replies, "why do you want to do that? The tires rotate whenever the car is moving." O'Brien exclaims, "I didn't mean rotating forward!" Bobby B., quick with a comeback, replies, "if you want them to rotate backwards, then put the car in reverse." O'Brien, again, feels as if he is getting messed with, which he is.

Bobby B. tells O'Brien to start the car. This time, the car starts. O'Brien drives off, totally forgetting that Eddie was going to look at his engine, leaving a puddle of oil on the ground behind him. Or, perhaps, O'Brien drove away because Bobby B. was messing with him. Either way, it's one less problem that Eddie will have to deal with today.

Bobby B. walks back into the service area, and Eddie tells him, "when you filled O'Brien's tank, you doubled the value of his car. Jake is right. He should just sell that piece of shit for scrap metal." Bobby B. asks, "who's Jake?" Eddie replies, "he's a mechanic on the other side of town. He's a nice guy. When Angelo first moved to this country, he worked for Jake for a while." Eddie and Bobby B. get back to work, wondering when Jimmy O'Brien will return.

Around lunchtime, Officer Richard Hayes drives into the service station, yelling out to Eddie, "what's up?" Eddie replies, "what's up?" Officer Hayes walks into the service area and, seeing Bobby B., asks, "hey, are you working here now?" Bobby B. replies, "yeah. Part time." Eddie, Bobby B., and Officer Hayes talk for a while, catching up on a few things before school starts.

During the conversation, Officer Hayes mentions, "about that incident over there at the pool, this Terry Haynes character isn't doing too well." Bobby B. asks, "really? How bad is she?" Eddie sarcastically comments, "she was never doing any good to begin with." Richard explains, "after we placed her under arrest, we tried to get a statement out of her. She doesn't remember anything about what happened." Bobby B. asks, "really?" Richard elaborates, "her skull was fractured, and she has a

serious concussion. Erika was right. From the looks of things, she's not likely to ever fire a gun in the future."

Eddie comments, "that girl has turned into a serious piece of work." Richard replies, "you guys are very lucky. The gun she had was fully loaded. And, you'll never guess who the gun is registered to." Taking a wild guess, Eddie replies, "Goldshit?" Richard replies, "close. The gun comes back to a Stanley Goldstein, Andrew Goldstein's father." Bobby B. replies, "wow! This is getting interesting."

Eddie asks, "so, how's the Chuckie doing?" Richard replies, "he's not too good either. His mother wants you arrested." Eddie laughs and exclaims, "me? I didn't do anything!" Richard explains, "somehow, she thinks that you instigated the whole thing." Eddie replies, "yeah. I can hear this one in court. 'Edward, please describe your part in the incident that happened at the pool last Summer.' 'I bought a gun, registered it to Goldshit's father, and gave it to Haynes. Then, I told Haynes exactly when to come to the pool to shoot all of us.' 'How else were you involved, Edward?' 'I told Haynes to invite the Chuckie too, because I wanted to watch him get his ass kicked before we all got shot.' Yeah, right. I don't think so."

Richard laughs, telling Eddie and Bobby B., "nothing will ever come of it. Brandishing a weapon is a serious charge. And, this Haynes character is being charged with attempted kidnaping, since she attempted to remove Erika from the pool area. The DA will be throwing the book at them. The weapons charge will definitely stick." Bobby B. replies, "good."

Richard then gives Eddie and Bobby B. some advice, telling them, "if I were you guys, I would look into purchasing a weapon, and getting some firearms training. Some of these characters around here have a screw loose." Bobby B. replies, "after what happened, Erika's father gave her a thirty-eight. She already knows how to shoot." Richard replies, "good."

Eddie asks Richard, "speaking of crazy people, did they ever find out what happened to McCrutchen during the divisional meet?" Richard shakes his head, and replies, "you're not going to believe this one." Eddie laughs, and tells Bobby B., "this is going to be good." Richard explains, "this Todd McCutchen character took a high dose of codeine before the race to reduce pain, thinking he would have a better run. Adding fuel to the fire, McCutchen also took a considerable amount of caffeine in pill form, to give him extra energy. But, it doesn't stop there. He used an asthma inhaler so he can breathe better. Apparently, that combination of drugs seriously affected his heart. He collapsed because he had some sort of heart rhythm problem. And, it took the doctors a couple days to get him stabilized. They say he's lucky to be alive."

Hearing Richard's description of what happened, Eddie exclaims, "McCrudden's father claimed that McCrudden had a heart problem over a year ago! They blamed it on stress! Stress that McCrudden claimed was caused by me, Mark, Braden, and everyone else!" Richard replies, "with these clowns, that doesn't surprise me. From what I see, you guys seem to be the target of a lot of this nonsense. And, it's obviously because your team always wins."

Eddie tells Richard, "I'm changing my sign out by the street. I'm going to change it to, 'They, Incorporated'. And the tag line will be, 'Blame Us For Everything!'" Bobby B. asks, "what?" Eddie explains, "you know. Everyone always says stuff like, 'they robbed the store', or 'they are building a road here', or 'they don't have any information'. Get it?" Bobby B. laughs, replying, "yeah! Now I do." Richard laughs, and tells Eddie, "that's a good one." Richard then gets back on patrol, heading toward town to get some lunch.

Once Officer Hayes drives away, Eddie tells Bobby B., "Richard stops by a few times a week. If you have any interesting information, let him know." Bobby B. asks, "so, that's how you always know everything that's going on?" Eddie replies, "yeah. And, Richard also drops a 'wanted vehicle' list by occasionally, which has the description of vehicles that were stolen, involved in a hit and run, and that sort of thing. It's in the top drawer in the desk. Check it out sometime." Eddie and Bobby B. get back to work, wondering what they are going to be blamed for next.

With the Summer coming to a close, Karen desperately wants answers to some very specific questions. On a weekday, Kathy and Karen head out to Karen's parent's house, which is about 80 miles away from the University. Wondering who her biological parents are, Karen is determined to find out. And, depending on the answer she receives, Karen might just pick up the rest of her stuff and bring it all back to the University. On the way, Karen mulls over the many potential answers she may receive from the person who alleges to be her mother.

As they approach Karen's parent's house, as opposed to being anxious, Karen feels strong. Finally, with the upper hand, Karen will not allow her mother to get away with bullshit, ranting, and bitching. Karen tells Kathy, "as usual, my mother is going to make a big scene. But, this time, she's not getting away with it. I want answers, and I'm going to get them." Kathy reassures Karen, telling her, "you deserve them. Maybe you'll even find out why she's always so mean to you." Karen tells Kathy, "speaking of that, if she flies off the handle, and you don't want to listen to it, feel free to go for a walk." Kathy again reassures Karen, "don't worry about me. If I can handle Mr. Crum and Dean Grimsby, I can handle anything."

Approaching her house, Karen slows down, and pulls into the driveway, revving up her engine a few times before shutting it off. Karen tells Kathy, “slam the door when you get out. I want her to know I’m here.” Kathy and Karen both slam the car doors shut, announcing their arrival. Karen gets two cardboard boxes out of her trunk, and slams the trunk shut as well. As they are walking up to the door, Karen whispers to Kathy, “watch this. The door is going to open, and my mother will be on the other side of it. And, she’ll spew out some stupid sarcastic remark.”

Karen gets out her key, not expecting to use it. Sure enough, Karen’s mother opens the door, announcing, “what are you doing here? Your father isn’t home.” Karen replies, “school starts soon, so I came to pick up a few things. And, I have a few questions.” Karen’s mother replies, “oh, I see. Well, come in.” Kathy and Karen walk in with the two boxes, as her mother walks back to the kitchen.

Karen takes a seat at the kitchen table, prompting her mother to ask, “so, you mentioned you have a question?” Surprised that her mother even remembered, Karen replies, “yeah.” As she is drying a frying pan, Karen’s mother asks, “so, what is it? Do you need money for school, or something?” Getting right to the point, Karen replies, “no. I want to know exactly who my biological parents are.” Karen’s mother freezes, dropping the frying pan onto the floor. Quite startled at Karen’s question, Karen’s mother asks, “what are you talking about?” Karen boldly replies, “don’t start with the bullshit. Let me get right to the point. Your blood type is AB. Mine is O. That means that you can’t possibly be my biological mother but, there is an outside chance that dad can be my biological father. Now, who are my biological parents? And, don’t even think of trying to weasel your way out of this one!”

Trying to get out of the mess, Karen’s mother points at Kathy, and yells, “so, do you have anything to do with this?” Giving Mrs. Corey a biology lesson, Kathy politely replies, “no, ma’am. Karen took Biology 202 last semester. If the biological mother is blood type AB, they cannot possibly have a child with blood type O<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, if the mother’s blood type is O, they cannot have a child with blood type AB.” Karen then tells her mother, “so, you’re either not blood type AB, as you claim, or you are not my biological mother. So, which is it?” Avoiding the question, Karen’s mother yells, “oh! So, this is why you came home when your father isn’t home, isn’t it?”

Clearly knowing her mother is avoiding the question, Karen bluntly tells her mother, “I’m going to ask you one more time and, if you don’t answer me, I’m calling dad and I’ll ask him. Now, who are my biological

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix III.

parents?" Karen's mother starts crying, blabbering words that cannot be understood. Tired of the delay tactics, Karen tells her mother, "a simple name or two will do. That shouldn't be too hard." Karen's mother yells at Karen, "I'm sick and tired of your attitude!" Using her mother's words, Karen yells back, "and, I'm sick and tired of yours! So, I'm getting the rest of my stuff and going home! And then, I'm calling dad, and I'll find out who my biological parents are one way or another."

Karen and Kathy go to Karen's bedroom, gathering as much of Karen's possessions as they can. After loading up her car, Kathy and Karen go back inside to fill the boxes a second time. Meanwhile, Karen's mother sits at the kitchen table, crying her heart out. Karen would question whether her mother even has a heart. After cleaning out her room of all her possessions, Karen tells her mother, "bye," as she continues to ball at the kitchen table.

Quite unexpectedly, Karen's mother looks at Karen, and cries out, "Aunt Jeannie!" Karen asks, "what? Aunt Jeannie is my biological mother? I don't think so! She's my aunt!" Trying to compose herself, Karen's mother explains, "no! Aunt Jeannie is your mother. Uncle Joe was your father. Jeannie couldn't raise you alone, so we adopted you."

Finally with some answers, Karen is shocked, and quietly says to herself, "Aunt Jeannie. That makes sense. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. That makes more sense than anything." Finally getting her answer, Karen heads toward the door, as her mother continues sobbing at the kitchen table. Before she closes the door, Karen yells out to her mother, "I'll let you explain this one to dad and Aunt Jeannie!"

Kathy and Karen get in Karen's car, and drive away. Kathy asks Karen, "are you okay?" Karen replies, "I'm good. Really good. This makes a lot of sense." Kathy asks, "how do you mean?" Karen explains, "my Aunt Jeannie played basketball in college, and that's where she met my Uncle Joe. After college, she went to chiropractic school. They got married, but Uncle Joe died in an auto accident a year later. From what they told me, my Uncle Joe ran track in college, and he was really good at it. He was also into martial arts. He was like a third-level black belt. I heard a lot about him, but I never met him because he died before I was born." Kathy observes, "so, that's where you got your athleticism from!" Karen replies, "yeah. I suppose so. In case you haven't noticed, my mother doesn't have an athletic bone in her body. My father used to play a few sports, but nothing serious. And, my two brothers aren't athletic at all. I was always wondering how come I never quite fit in. Now I know."

Karen goes on to explain, "this is really beginning to make a lot of sense now. My Aunt Jeanie always gave me really nice birthday and Christmas presents. And, when I was in high school, she came to a lot of

my track meets.” Karen then laments, “no wonder my mother always hated me. My Aunt Jeannie is my father’s sister. And, my mother was always ticked off when my Aunt Jeannie was over for holiday gatherings. That would make my mother kind of like an outsider. No wonder she always treated me like shit.” Kathy tells Karen, “I am so sorry. That must have really sucked.” Karen replies, “don’t be. I finally got my answers.”

With some good news, Kathy tells Karen, “well, the good side of this is that you don’t have your mother’s genetics.” Still ticked off at her mother, Karen replies, “good. I’m glad. I’d hate to think I’ll grow up and be like her. From now on, I’m calling my mother, or whatever she is, my former babysitter.” Kathy laughs, and tells Karen, “that sounds kind of funny! Your former babysitter.” Karen replies, “if she gives me anymore shit, that’s what I’m calling her.”

Karen asks Kathy, “do you remember when I told you that, when I was younger, if I misbehaved, she was going to put me up for adoption?” Kathy replies, “yeah. And, she was going to have the police put you in jail.” Karen replies, “yeah. Well, once, when I was like in third grade, I went outside in the snow without a jacket. My mother yelled at me, and said, ‘I’ll teach you to go outside without a jacket.’ Then she locked the door, and I was outside for an hour, freezing. I banged and banged on the door, and she wouldn’t let me in. So, I ran around the back yard in circles just to keep warm.” Kathy exclaims, “no wonder you left her there crying!” Karen tells Kathy, “she can cry for a month straight, and it won’t hold a candle to how much she made me cry.”

Karen tells Kathy, “so, my former babysitter, or whatever she is, isn’t even related to me, except by marriage.” Kathy replies, “at least, now you have some real answers.” Karen laughs, and tells Kathy, “she thought I needed money! Can you believe it? That was kind of funny.” Kathy asks, “how was that funny?” Karen explains, “there are only two kinds of relatives, close relatives and distant relatives. Your close relatives you see often, like at Christmas, Thanksgiving, during birthdays and at cookouts. Distant relatives suddenly become close relatives when they need money or a place to stay.” Kathy laughs, and replies, “ain’t that the truth.” Karen then hypothetically asks, “I wonder where a former babysitter fits in.”

Not wanting Karen to spend the afternoon alone, Kathy tells Karen, “hey, Eddie is about to get off of work. Do you want to go with us and get pizza?” Karen replies, “sure! I’d love to!” Karen asks, “does Eddie get off of work early?” Kathy explains, “yeah. I start work at the elementary school on Wednesday. Eddie’s working hours coincide with mine, so we can have more time together.” Karen drives to the service station, where Eddie is just finishing up for the day.

Kathy walks up and yells out, "hey! Our Johnson Rod has gone bad! We need a new one!" Eddie yells back, "I'm so sorry. We're closed for the day!" Kathy tells Eddie, "hey! We're going out for pizza with Karen." Eddie replies, "Mark mentioned something about meeting us at the pizzeria." Today's cruise director, Kathy, tells Eddie, "awesome! You go home and change. I'll head home too and call Paula." Kathy and Karen head to Kathy's house, planning the evening out with friends, as Eddie finishes up for the day.

Before they start teaching, Kathy and Paula decide to head back to the red universe, curiously wondering whether Kathy's counterpart was able to move back into her home on Rolling Hill Road. Paula meets Kathy at Kathy's house, each wearing a necklace with their red stone. Bringing their bicycles to Kathy's home portal behind her Jasmine wall, Kathy does the honors, stating, "take us to the red universe." Kathy and Paula walk out of the portal, to the other side of the Jasmine wall.

Kathy exclaims, "I, or she, moved back in! All the patio furniture is around the pool!" Paula replies, "awesome! And, there you are, sitting by the pool reading something." Kathy's counterpart in the red universe looks up, and yells out, "hey, guys! Are you from my universe, or another one?" Wearing a yellow shirt, Kathy replies, "we're from the yellow universe." Kathy's counterpart smiles, and tells Kathy and Paula, "do I ever have some news for you! Come over, and have a seat."

Kathy asks, "what's all the news?" Kathy's counterpart replies, "first of all, Chuckie has moved into a private room in the sanitarium. So, he's out of the picture for a long time! And Goldstein, well, he's kept his distance." Kathy replies, "awesome!" Paula asks, "how about Mrs. Black?" Kathy's counterpart replies, "she's not doing too well herself. From what I hear, she thinks the Chuckie doped up her coffee. And, she still can't figure out how she ended up in Hawaii. So, she had the Chuckie committed." Kathy and Paula laugh and exchange high-fives with Kathy's counterpart, glad to hear that the troublemakers have finally been brought under control.

Kathy's counterpart continues, "since sending them far away worked so well with the Chuckie, Goldshit, and Mrs. Black, I went over to Donna and Dana Harmon's house, and did the same thing with them. But, I transported them to China. And, when I left them there, I told them that, if I ever see them again, next time it's going to be Siberia." Kathy and Paula laugh hysterically. Once Kathy catches her breath, she exclaims, "China? Are you serious? Tell me you didn't!" Kathy's counterpart replies, "yeah. I did. And, get this. When they got back three weeks later, they filed a police report, and wanted to have me arrested. So, the police came out to my house, and questioned me. It was kind of hard to sit there and take the accusation seriously, so I just played dumb. So, now

the Harmon sisters are seriously afraid of me.” Kathy replies, “good!” Paula comments, “that’s really kind of funny when you think about it.”

Kathy’s counterpart explains, “I also got rid of the bitchkrieg. She’s the one that shot at our house a while back. That bitch is seriously psycho.” Terry Haynes, also known as the bitchkrieg, has been a serious problem, not only in the red universe, but the yellow universe as well. Kathy asks, “what did you do with her?” Kathy’s counterpart laughs, and explains, “I told the portal to transport Terry Haynes one microsecond into the future. So, she was transported, but I was not. So, follow me here. By transporting her one microsecond into the future, Haynes, and her counterpart from one microsecond in the past, occupy the same space, but one microsecond apart. I was wondering whether one of them can escape from occupying the same space, but apparently they can’t.” Kathy exclaims, “that is so weird! But, I can see that.”

Kathy’s counterpart explains, “so, then the bitchkrieg went crazy. I told the bitchkrieg that I put a nerve replicator in her head, and that it’s replicating her nervous system. And, I told her that there are two of her in her head right now. So, the bitchkrieg yelled out, ‘how do I make it stop? Please, please! Tell me!’ So, I told her, ‘you can’t. But, I can make it stop by removing the nerve replicator.’ Then, the bitchkrieg yelled out, ‘take it out! Please, take it out!’” Kathy exclaims, “this is getting really good! So, what happened?”

Kathy’s counterpart continues, “so, I told the bitchkrieg, ‘both of you morons in that head, shut up and listen to me.’ So, she quieted down, and I explained to her that I am from the ancient lost civilization of Luschka, and I have superpowers. I also told her that Eddie, Paula, and Mark also have superpowers. Then I asked her, ‘how do you think I transported Chuckie, his mother, and Goldshit to Hawaii? And, how do you think I transported Donna and Dana Harmon to China?’ She’s already heard about that, so she was getting really scared.” Paula laughs, telling Kathy and her counterpart, “this is getting better all the time!”

Kathy’s counterpart continues, “yeah, seriously. It is. So, I told the bitchkrieg to close her eyes, and I’ll take the nerve replicator out of her head. So, I put her back into my temporary portal, and it transported her one microsecond into the past, eliminating the time differential. Then, I told her, ‘if you ever give me a problem again, I’ll put a nerve replicator and a brain scrambler in your head, and leave them both there.’ So, I reminded her that I’m from the ancient civilization of Luschka, and I have superpowers way beyond her comprehension. So she started screaming, ‘I knew it! I always knew there was something weird about you guys! I just knew it!’ So, then I reminded her that we always win, on the track and off. You should have seen her. She was really scared.” Kathy and Paula laugh hysterically, wishing they were there to see that.

Kathy asks, “so, when you transported her one microsecond into the future, the other her still existed?” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “yeah. I was wondering whether that would work or not. I figured that, if I can meet myself at a different time, and there were two of me, like I did with Paul Mahoney, then why not one microsecond into the future? So, that would put her both in the present and one microsecond into the future in the same physical space. I was thinking that, when she walked out of the portal, she would see two of herself. Then, I would throw her back into the portal and return her to her present time. But, as it turned out, she walked out of the portal, and sat on the ground panicking. So, when I put her back into the portal and transported her back one microsecond, then she was back to normal.” Paula comments, “that girl is the farthest thing from normal there is.”

Kathy’s counterpart continues, explaining, “and, then I told her that I know she’s going to call the police. So, I told her to go ahead and call them, and that I don’t care, because I could send the police to China too, if I wanted. So, I expect the police to show up any time now to question me.” Kathy laughs, and exclaims, “I’d love to be here and listen to that!”

Kathy and Paula talk with Kathy’s counterpart a while longer. The topic of conversation is primarily the differences between the yellow and red universes. Kathy relays that, in the yellow universe, Terry Haynes made a scene at the annual get-together at the county pool, and had a gun. Kathy reasons that, in the blue universe, Haynes must also have access to a gun. And, in both the yellow and red universes, Chuckie is turning into more of a hopeless basket case each year. The same can be said of the Harmon sisters.

Kathy’s counterpart makes the comment, “the differences among the three universes are really interesting.” Kathy asks, “how so?” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “in the blue universe, my counterpart there is really peaceful and content. In your universe, you are definitely a lot more athletic. And, in my universe, I am more focused on academics. It seems like that, in the blue universe, Kathy is more spiritual. In the yellow universe, Kathy is more physical. And, in my universe, Kathy is more intellectual. And, it’s the same with Eddie in each universe.”

Not recalling that her counterpart in the red universe has met Eddie in the yellow universe, Kathy asks, “how do you know about Eddie in my universe?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “me and my Eddie were at the divisional meet when the three world records were broken. That was a really good meet!” Kathy asks, “didn’t Eddie go to the meet in your universe?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah. He did. He didn’t break any records, though. But, later that week, we traveled back in time to see how Eddie, in the yellow universe, did in the meet. And, since Eddie isn’t at the University in the blue universe, we didn’t go there to see.”

Curious about herself in the red universe. Paula asks, “how about me and Mark?” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “it’s the same. In my universe, you and Mark analyze everything to an extreme. Like, when you guys built your house in this universe, Mark built it way beyond what the building code requires.” Paula mentions, “he did the same in our universe, but he didn’t really analyze much.” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “but, get this. In my universe, Mark has the position of every stud in every wall and every floor joist documented on the blueprints. And, he documented exactly where every wire and water pipe is in the walls.” Paula comments, “wow! In my universe, Mark didn’t quite go to that extent.”

Out of the blue, Kathy’s counterpart mentions, “well, it looks like I’m headed to jail for putting the nerve replicator in the bitchkrieg’s empty head.” Paula exclaims, “what?” Kathy’s counterpart smiles, and replies, “a police car just came around the corner. It’s probably Officer Hayes, and he’s going to question me about Terry Haynes. Hey! You guys can hide behind the Jasmine wall, and listen if you want. And, if you need to make a quick getaway, the portal is right there.” Kathy replies, “yeah. I want to hear this! This will be funny!” Kathy and Paula grab their bicycles, and hide behind the Jasmine wall, as Officer Hayes’ counterpart in the red universe walks up the driveway.

Seeing Officer Hayes, Kathy’s counterpart yells out, “hey! I’m back here!” Officer Hayes walks through the pool gate, and takes a seat with Kathy’s counterpart. Officer Hayes’ counterpart in the red universe tells Kathy’s counterpart, “you’re not going to believe this one.” Kathy’s counterpart acts surprised, and replies, “uh oh. What did I do this time?” Officer Hayes replies, “I don’t even know where to begin.” Kathy’s counterpart and Officer Hayes talk for a while, then Officer Hayes gets down to business.

Officer Hayes, referring to his notes, explains, “this Terry Haynes character filed a report, and says you put a nerve replicator in her head.” Acting serious, Kathy’s counterpart replies, “darn. I told her she’d better not tell anyone about that,” then asks, “what’s a nerve replicator?” Officer Hayes replies, “I wish I knew. She also claims that you admitted to transporting this Charles Black character, and his mother, to Hawaii, and transported Donna and Dana Harmon to China.” Kathy’s counterpart exclaims, “darn! Busted again! I wonder how I managed to do that.”

Officer Hayes laughs and, again referring to his notes, tells Kathy’s counterpart, “now, get this. This Haynes character also alleges that you told her that you are from some ancient civilization named Luschka, and that you have some sort of superpowers.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “wow! Now, we’re finally getting around to something I actually did! I’m surprised she even remembered that!” Officer Hayes asks, “so, you

actually told her that?" Kathy's counterpart sighs, and replies, "yeah. That I'll admit to. But, it's only because she's wacky. If I knew ahead of time that she was going to fall for that one, I would have told her that I'm Wonder Woman, and that I'm from Paradise Island. You know, next time I see her, I'm going to tell her that Paula is Superwoman. I wonder what kind of weird drugs Haynes is taking these days." Officer Hayes can't help but to laugh.

Officer Hayes explains to Kathy's counterpart, "I do have a problem here. This Charles Black character and his mother did land in Hawaii somehow. And, these Harmon sisters did land in China. They have no explanation of how they got there. Something's going on." Kathy's counterpart interjects, "so, they're blaming me?" Officer Hayes replies, "it would appear that way. And, when Andrew Goldstein, Charles Black, and his mother disappeared to Hawaii, this Terry Haynes character was inside the Black residence. She claims she saw you pick up some rocks on the front lawn, and tossed them into the bushes." Kathy's counterpart exclaims, "wow! This is making perfect sense now! Those three rocks I supposedly threw when I supposedly was at the Chuckie's house must have been voodoo rocks! And, when the rocks landed in the bushes, the three of them must have landed in Hawaii!" Officer Hayes replies, "that makes about as much sense as anything they're saying."

Kathy's counterpart suggests, "I'm no expert, but it sounds to me like they took a big white bird, and flew right out of here." Officer Hayes replies, "they've been flying high for years. It's about time they actually left the ground. But, I'm guessing someone in their organization is trying to teach them a lesson. Since they can't reveal who it is, they make this stuff up. And, believe me. They're all really good at making stuff up." Kathy laughs, and suggests, "I'm guessing they should add an entire wing onto the sanatorium for these crackpots." Officer Hayes replies, "trust me. If it was up to me, I'd have these characters all locked away in an instant."

Getting to the real reason for his visit, Officer Hayes tells Kathy's counterpart, "so, here's the problem. These clowns, for some reason, are after you and, perhaps, Eddie too. I can't even begin to imagine what kind of stories they'll be coming up with next. In the meantime, you may want to make sure your house is secure, and get an alarm system. Also, you may want to make sure you can defend yourself against an intruder. By that, I mean purchasing a firearm and getting some training on how to use it." Kathy's counterpart informs Officer Hayes, "when that Haynes bitch shot at our house, Eddie bought a gun. It's in the drawer of his night stand. And, there are nunchucks and throwing stars hidden in a few places around the house." Officer Hayes replies, "good. And, remember. The police have a few sayings. One of them is that it's better to be tried by twelve than to be carried by six. The other is dead men tell no tales." Kathy's counterpart replies, "got it."

In summary, Officer Hayes explains, “I don’t think this Haynes character will be too much of a problem. I just thought I’d give you the heads up.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “I really appreciate that. Oh, and Mark will be starting to build the wall around my house really soon. That might help keep them out.” Officer Hayes tells Kathy’s counterpart, “that’s another good idea. Oh, and there have been a few break ins in the area. So, along the outside of the wall, if you can, plant plants that are unfriendly to intruders, like something with really nasty thorns.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “or poison ivy.” Officer Hayes laughs, then tells Kathy’s counterpart that he has to head out, quite glad to hear that everything is under control.

Once the police car drives away, Kathy and Paula come out from behind the Jasmine wall. Kathy immediately asks her counterpart, “so, you’re building a wall?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah. Just like the one that Mark built for Eddie behind the service station.” Kathy exclaims, “in my universe, we already have a wall around our house!” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “well, after all, you are me. And, it would be nice if all three universes match.” Kathy tells her counterpart, “oh, and if you do build a wall, don’t forget to put a gate near the portal, like we did. And, leave the key for us who come from the other universes. And, we might as well get locks for each universe with the same key.” Paula suggests, “like the Abloy locks that Eddie got for the storage yard.”

Kathy asks, “what’s all this about the ancient civilization named Luschka?” Kathy’s counterpart laughs, and explains, “I totally made that up. And now, Mark and Paula are saying they’re from Luschka, and have superpowers too.” Practicing her potential future lines, Kathy stands up, flexes her biceps muscles, and claims, “I am Katarina. I come from the ancient civilization called Luschka. And, I have superpowers.” Paula laughs, and comments, “this is going somewhere, girl. I can tell.”

Recalling Officer Hayes’ conversation, Kathy’s counterpart mentions, “so, the bitchkrieg may have witnessed me going through the portal with the Chuckie and Goldshit, or perhaps Mrs. Black. But, they were pretty high on something that day. I had no idea Haynes was in the house.” Kathy comments, “she was probably as high as the rest of them.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah. But, she apparently remembers something. That could be a problem.” Paula replies, “voodoo rocks thrown into the bushes. That’s all she’ll remember.” Kathy’s counterpart admits, “you’re probably right.”

Kathy then points out to her counterpart, “so, Officer Hayes in your universe told you that there have been a few break ins around here? That is really weird! In my universe, over Spring break, someone broke into our house. We were leaving for church, and Eddie came from the future to warn us. So, we stayed home and, when the time came, we waited for him

to break in. When he broke in, Eddie kicked the shit out of him! So now, I'm wondering if it's the same person breaking into houses in both universes." Kathy's counterpart replies, "based upon probability, I'm going to definitely say yes."

Kathy's counterpart asks Kathy, "do you remember the name of the guy who broke in?" Kathy replies, "oh, yeah! His name was Giuseppe Vio Otto. That's his last name, Vio Otto. He works for the town in the planning department. He's in jail now. And, when Eddie got done with him, let's just say he'll never break into anyone's house again." Kathy's counterpart mentions, "Giuseppe Vio Otto. Somehow, I'm going to let Officer Hayes know about him." Kathy replies, "good. And, that little piece of shit, Vio Otto, is working for someone else because, since they put him away, there have been a few more break ins. It sounds like he's part of a burglary ring."

Now quite curious, Kathy asks her counterpart, "hey. In your universe, when Eddie was a senior, did Braden kick the shit out of Goldshit when Goldshit tripped him on the track?" Kathy's counterpart exclaims, "I remember when he tripped Braden! But, no. Braden didn't kick the shit out of him. What happened in your universe?" Kathy explains to her counterpart about the incident when Braden broke Goldstein's jaw, fractured his skull, and dislocated his shoulder, all in fifteen seconds. Kathy's counterpart replies, "wow! In a way, I'm almost sorry that I missed that! In my universe, after Goldshit tripped Braden, Eddie, Mark, and Braden started to approach Goldshit. Goldshit was scared as shit, and bolted up the stairs. He never came back to practice after that. Then, the next day, Braden told Goldshit that he was going to kick his ass sometime when he least expects it. Goldshit was running scared for the rest of the school year."

Kathy sits back and concludes, "all these different paths because, in the blue universe, Eddie never finished high school. And, in the yellow universe, Eddie finished high school, and kicked the shit out of the Chuckie during his senior year. And, in the red universe, Eddie graduated from high school, but never kicked the shit out of the Chuckie. And now, the differences in how Braden handled the incident with Goldshit." Kathy's counterpart agrees, adding, "and, that's what we know about. I'm guessing that, in my universe, because Braden didn't kick the shit out of Goldshit during tryouts, Goldshit never got subdued." Kathy mentions, "I can see that. And, who knows what else there is."

Thinking about today's discussion, Kathy's counterpart mentions, "I think I figured out why time doesn't elapse when we go through the portal." All excited, Kathy replies, "do tell!" Kathy's counterpart explains, "when we go through the portal, time elapses where we go to, whether it is in our same universe, or a different one. Time can't elapse for one

person in two places at once, so it elapses where we are at the moment.” Kathy replies, “yeah! That makes a lot of sense.” Kathy’s counterpart concludes, “if time elapsed in both places at once, we’d age twice as fast.” Paula comments, “I never thought about that!”

After a long and interesting conversation, Kathy and Paula head back to their Universe, not quite surprised to learn that Chuckie, Haynes, Goldstein, and the Harmon sisters are as much of a problem in their universe as in the red universe. As they walk to the portal behind the Jasmine wall, Paula whispers to Kathy, “in the red universe, you really took care of the bitchkrieg.” Kathy whispers back, “yeah. That’s really kind of funny what she did to her. I’ll have to remember that. A nerve replicator and a brain scrambler.” Kathy and Paula walk into the portal, returning to their time.

Tuesday evening, before Kathy’s first day at work, Eddie and Kathy spend the evening in their pool. While laying on the chaise lounges side by side, Kathy tells Eddie, “it’s going to be so nice to have a normal life for once. This past year has been a really hard one.” Eddie asks, “what’s a normal life?” Kathy replies, “you know. Like, getting up in the morning, going to work, and coming home and having dinner. And then going in the pool or seeing a movie.” Eddie comments, “if that’s a normal life, then I’ve never had a normal life.” Kathy tells Eddie, “then, maybe we can get one for you.” Eddie laughs, gets up, and dives into the water.

Following Eddie, Kathy dives in. Eddie jokingly mentions, “I heard Mr. Crum’s brother is the principal at the elementary school.” Kathy splashes Eddie, exclaiming, “is not!” Eddie replies, “is so. I heard he’s fixing the events at field day.” Kathy exclaims, “is not! You’re making all this up!” Eddie tells Kathy, “I also hear the math teacher’s name is some guy named Grimsby.” Kathy reminds Eddie, “it’s an elementary school! They don’t have math teachers. The teachers teach all subjects!” Eddie replies, “okay. I’m busted.”

Kathy tells Eddie, “you know, you just gave me an idea. I’m going to mess with Paula, and tell her that the principal in the middle school is related to Mr. Crum.” Eddie tells Kathy, “you know what she’s going to say, don’t you.” Kathy replies, “tell me.” Imitating Paula, Eddie exclaims, “stop it, girl! If the principal was related to Mr. Crum, Mr. Zunde would have told me!” Kathy laughs, and tells Eddie, “that was actually pretty good! You sounded just like her.” Then, imitating Mark, Eddie tells Kathy, “and, Mark would say, ‘well, that didn’t go exactly as planned.’” Kathy laughs again, and replies, “he does say that a lot, especially when disaster strikes.” Eddie laughs, and mentions, “yeah. Like when McCrutchen gets the baton shoved in his ass.”

As they are floating in the pool, Kathy mentions to Eddie, “we haven’t been to the beach much recently. And, the Summer is almost over.” Slow to reply, Eddie tells Kathy, “yeah, I’ve noticed that. We used to go every week. But, we have a beach in our back yard now. All we have to do is tell the portal to take us to the beach.” Kathy replies, “then, how are we not going to the beach more?” Thinking about Kathy’s question, Eddie replies, “I guess we were too busy with track and messing with the McCrutchens. You were busy getting your degree. And, I was busy with the service station.” Kathy agrees with Eddie, but just silently lies on her float.

Kathy gets off her float and half-heartedly swims a few laps in the pool with Eddie. After the third lap, Kathy tells Eddie, “I’d better not wear myself out. I have to go to work tomorrow.” Eddie replies, “yeah. You’ll be sitting in meetings for three days before the students get there. Meetings can be really strenuous.” Knowing that Eddie is messing with her, Kathy replies, “yeah, seriously. All that writing. I could strain a muscle in my hand.”

Putting her arms around his neck, Kathy looks Eddie in the eye, and tells him, “let’s start our normal life now.” Kathy touches her lips to Eddie’s, and kisses him passionately. For the rest of the evening, Eddie and Kathy catch up on the billions of kisses she promised him many years ago.