

Eddie, The Collegiate Senior

Chapter Ten The Final Twist

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Wasting no time in wanting to see Eddie's stock report, Athena drops by Eddie's Service Station early on Monday morning. Walking into the office right when Eddie opens, Athena announces, "good morning! I thought I'd come by before you got to work. I didn't want to interrupt your day. I know quite well what it's like getting interrupted when you're in the middle of something." Eddie turns on the lights and the radio, and tells Athena, "your tan is looking good." Athena replies, "thank you for noticing."

Truth is, Athena wants to get busy as fast as possible with Eddie's stock market plan. But, Athena is highly intelligent and conservative when dealing with money. Her plan is to see how Eddie's stock picks pan out before she invests a lot of money.

Eddie and Athena talk for a while before they get down to business, focusing on Eddie's wall of pictures. Athena comments, "there's Mark and Paula in their Dune Buggy." Eddie replies, "that picture was taken when they first got it." Eddie then points out, "there's the picture of your mom, in her van, when she drove away." Athena tells Eddie, "that's a really great photograph. May I get a copy of it sometime?" Eddie replies, "sure. I'll have Lynn copy it when I get the next roll developed." Athena requests, "tell them to enlarge it to eleven by fourteen. I'll gladly pay you for it." Eddie replies, "no problem."

Eddie takes a seat behind his desk, and unlocks the drawers. Athena takes a seat, noticing how clean the office appears compared with other service stations. Searching in the filing draw, Eddie pulls out a few pieces of paper. Handing a piece of paper to Athena, Eddie explains, "this is the latest sheet. Kathy types these up. There's a few columns. Column one is the name of the stock. Column two is the stock symbol. Column three is the drop dead date to buy, and column four is the date to sell it. And, I

wouldn't really hold anything on the list past the sell date." Eddie already knows what will happen to the stock price after the sell date. Athena peruses Eddie's research, as Eddie walks over to the copier.

Making copies of his last six sheets, Eddie hands them to Athena, and further explains, "here's the last six sheets. If you want to check out my work, feel free." Athena comments, "Mike is really going to find this interesting. We own a few stocks that we've been holding long term." Athena then asks, "do you hold any stocks long term?" Eddie replies, "yes, two in specific. They're both utility companies. They're never really going to go anywhere long term, but the quarterly dividend check is nice. Mark calls it his bonus check." Eddie tells Athena the names of the utility stocks he owns over the long term. It's a sure bet Athena will check those out as well.

Athena tells Eddie, "by the way, I'm selling my Jaguar if you know anyone who's interested." Quite surprised and alarmed, Eddie tells Athena, "I wouldn't sell that car if I were you. That's a Series 1 with a 4.2 liter engine. Twelve-cylinder cars don't depreciate over the long term. They appreciate. Someday, you're going to kick yourself for selling it." Athena considers Eddie's advice, considering her automobile has low milage and is in perfect condition. Athena's Jaguar is a late model E-Type, which is destined to become a classic.

Knowing that, if Athena wanted to sell her Jaguar, she must be in the market for something else. Eddie asks Athena, "what were you looking at buying?" Athena replies, "a Jeep, similar to Paula's or Mr. Frazier's. I've been thinking about it for a while." Eddie suggests, "if you really want one, I'd say get it. They're really nice. But, I still wouldn't sell the Jaguar." Athena replies, "okay. You have me convinced. I was on the fence about selling my Jaguar anyway. But, I still want the Jeep." Eddie suggests, "so, get the Jeep. You'll enjoy it. You can take it to the beach." Sounding a bit like Kathy, Athena replies, "yeah. I can do that."

Athena thanks Eddie for the information. Eddie invites Athena to come back at the beginning of the month for the next list. Athena drives away, headed to the University to begin her last official week as provost.

Later that afternoon, Captain Richard Hayes drops by the station to give Eddie some news. Walking into the service area, Richard yells out, "what's up?" Eddie, also having some news for Richard, yells back, "I got a date for you!" Richard asks, "what date is that?" Eddie replies, "on October 1, you guys can take possession of the administration building. It should be vacated in mid September." Richard replies, "that's really good news. I'm looking forward to it. Then, I can get to work organizing the new precinct."

Eddie asks, “have you guys figured out what you’re going to do with it yet?” Richard explains, “Chief Gabriel thought about moving the main office to the new location. The problem is that there’s no jail. So, he’s back to the original plan of opening a new precinct, which will be the seventh precinct. And, guess who’s going to be the captain of that precinct.” Eddie replies, asking, “you?” Richard replies, “yes. Me. And, my office will be the mayor’s office. And, Chief Gabriel will take the other executive office on that floor as a satellite office for himself. He’ll also keep his office downtown but, after seeing the executive suite in the administration building, he wants an office in the new building too.” Eddie replies, “awesome! I’m glad it’s all working out.”

Richard mentions, “it’s my job to plan the opening of the new precinct. I’ve never done this before.” Eddie points out, “it sounds like you’re on your way to police chief when Chief Gabriel retires.” Richard smiles, and replies, “you never know what’s going to happen ten or twenty years down the line.”

Eddie points out, “the new precinct is only about two miles from your house.” Richard replies, “two and a quarter miles to be exact, with one stoplight. I already measured it. And, I’ll be driving against the traffic both ways. It will take me less than five minutes.” Eddie mentions, “wow! And I thought that I had it good with a four-and-a-half mile commute.”

Richard then informs Eddie, “by the way, about that incident at your house during your graduation party. As it turns out, these McCutchen characters have resorted to stealing cars. You were right. Their legal bills are piling up, and they were stealing vehicles, and selling them to a chop shop. So, we ended up busting the chop shop.” Eddie asks, “how did you do that?” Richard explains, “these McCutchen characters aren’t too bright. They had a stolen car sitting right in their driveway. We staked out the location. A tow truck came to pick it up. The car ended up in a chop shop in the city. So, we’ll add auto theft to their charges.” Eddie exclaims, “wow! The McCutchen family has really gone off the deep end!”

Eddie reminisces, “you know, I remember McCutchen from middle school. That guy always went off the deep end whenever he lost a race. He would kick the ground, and throw his arms up in the air. Mark messed with him all the time, and he always fell for it. McCutchen was such a sucker.” Richard points out, “back in middle school, his father was probably grooming him for fixing races. They had it all planned out. Fixing races - that’s what it was all about with that family. The father was a track star. He forced his sons into a sport that they weren’t very competent at. It’s no wonder that they all went bad.” Eddie thinks back to Mr. Frazier’s commencement address, where Mr. Frazier encouraged everyone to run their own race.

With some unfortunate news, Richard reveals to Eddie, “about this Nicholson character, I just can’t pin that character down on any charges. He’s obviously involved, but no one we’ve questioned seems to know anything about him.” Eddie asks, “how about the stolen camera?” Richard replies, “Nicholson now claims he’s never seen it before. And now, Evans claims he made the story up when he said Nicholson owns the camera.” Eddie comments, “well, at least you know who’s going to be starting up the next gambling ring.” Richard smiles, and tells Eddie, “I think you’re right about that. Now, we’ll know exactly who to watch.”

Richard then asks, “that school, what’s the name of it?” Eddie replies, “Dogpatch University is what we call it.” Richard laughs, and replies, “yeah, that’s the one. That university is way out of our jurisdiction. I’ll have to contact the city over there, and get them involved.” Eddie points out, “with all the busts you guys have done, you’d think they’d stay out of this area.” Richard replies, “you’re right. They’ll probably just base their operations in another county. These characters all know by now that it’s too hot around here.”

Richard gets interrupted by a call on the radio. Looking at the clock, Eddie sees that it’s almost time for him to go home. Suddenly appearing disappointed, Richard tells Eddie, “well, it looks like I have to get on the road. We have a bridge jumper. Hopefully, someone can talk this character down before rush hour.” Eddie suggests, “get a life net under him, and hit him with a tranquilizing dart.” Richard laughs, and replies, “believe me. If I had my way, that’s how it would go down.” Eddie tells Richard, “good luck.” Richard heads out, hoping to get home on time today.

With Summer’s end near for some, Kathy’s Summer has been extended. Deciding not to teach this year, Kathy has chosen to be at home, raising her baby that is due on September 15. Taking Kathy’s place at the middle school this year will be Tessa Klement, who just graduated from the University this year. Paula, with her due date farther away, will be returning to teach at the middle school. Before Paula has to return to teaching, one last pool party is planned for a Saturday afternoon at Eddie and Kathy’s house.

Wanting everything to be perfect, Kathy and Eddie go outside in the early morning to check the pool. On their way outside, Eddie asks Kathy, “what’s the dead frog count this year?” Kathy energetically replies, “so far, zero! And, I found one live turtle.” Eddie asks, “what did you do with the turtle?” Kathy replies, “I put him in a box, and drove him over to the duck pond. He’ll be a lot happier there.”

Walking out the door, Kathy suddenly exclaims, “crap! We got trouble!” Running straight on for two intruders at the pool, Kathy and

Eddie each wonder how this could have possibly happened. Grabbing one intruder, Eddie exclaims in a comical tone, "Chuckie! It's been a while. Are you back for another ass kicking?" Chuckie exclaims, "let me go! Let me go!" Eddie replies, "no, junior. Not on your life."

Kathy, who is eight months pregnant, takes hold of the other intruder, who is none other than Terry Haynes, also known to the tribe as the bitchkrieg. Kathy sarcastically asks Haynes, "doing a little laundry today?" Haynes exclaims, "let me go! You're hurting me!" Kathy replies, "so what, bitch! Get used to it." Using both of her arms, Kathy twists Haynes arm behind her back. Haynes screams out in pain, now knowing what real pain is.

Chuckie and Haynes, caught with a bottle of laundry detergent, are not doing laundry. Their plan was to pour the detergent into Eddie and Kathy's pool, which would make a huge pile of suds by this afternoon's party. Fortunately, Eddie and Kathy caught them before they did any damage.

Eddie asks Kathy, "isn't the bitchkrieg in jail for assaulting Erika?" Kathy replies, "she's supposed to be." Eddie asks, "then, what's she doing here?" Kathy replies, "I have absolutely no idea!" Haynes exclaims, "I'm not in jail!" Suddenly seeing something interesting, Eddie tells Kathy, "bring her over here." Eddie yanks the chain around Haynes' neck, breaking it, then showing the necklace to Kathy. Eddie holds the necklace up so Kathy can see it. Kathy immediately exclaims, "shit!" Haynes exclaims, "give me my necklace back." Eddie replies, "no way. This is mine now."

Knowing that Chuckie can't swim, Eddie tells Kathy, "let the bitchkrieg go, and go inside and call Mark and Paula." Eddie then tells Haynes, "if you run, I'm going to throw the Chuckie into the pool. And, I'm not going to rescue him. Got it?" Kathy tightens the arm lock, also asking Haynes, "got it?" Haynes exclaims, "yeah, yeah! I got it. You're hurting me!" Eddie comments, "she's beginning to sound like Goldshit with this 'yeah, yeah' shit." Kathy releases Haynes. Eddie immediately tells Haynes, "get on the ground, face down!" Haynes complies, as Eddie reminds them, "if you move, the little Chuckie, here, is going for a swim." Kathy goes inside to call Mark and Paula, as Eddie detains the trespassers.

Mark and Paula arrive quickly, also wondering how Haynes is even here, as she is supposed to be in jail. Eddie tosses Haynes' necklace to Paula, telling her, "we caught her with this." Paula looks at the yellow stone, and exclaims, "shit! How did she get this?" Kathy whispers to Paula, "come over here with me," then tells Eddie and Mark, "we'll be right back."

Off to the side, where they cannot be heard, Kathy tells Paula, "I'm guessing they came from the red universe. I remember that me, in the red universe, said that Haynes was inside the house when she transported Chuckie, Haynes, and Goldshit to Hawaii. And, in the red universe." Now fearful, before Kathy could finish her sentence, Paula exclaims, "they've figured it out!" Kathy replies, "yeah." Kathy then yells out to Eddie, "we'll be back in a few minutes." Kathy drags Paula by the arm, heading inside.

Meanwhile, back at the pool area, Eddie maintains Chuckie in an arm lock, trying to extract a confession out of him. Mark suggests, "throw him in the pool. Then, he'll talk." Eddie guides Chuckie to the pool's edge, and tells Chuckie, "start talking, junior! Where did you come from?" Chuckie replies, "the necklace! You're hurting me!" Eddie suggests to Chuckie, "you'd better start talking, junior, or I'll show you what hurting you is." Chuckie exclaims, "the necklace brought us here!" From the ground, Haynes yells out, "he's telling the truth!" Eddie questions Chuckie further, but gets no additional information out of him.

Kathy and Paula return from inside, where they called Captain Hayes at home. Kathy informs Eddie and Mark, "I got some bad news. I talked to Richard, and he said Haynes is still in prison, and the Chuckie is still in rehab." Eddie asks, "are you sure?" Kathy replies, "he's completely sure." Eddie asks, "then, where did these two assholes come from?" Kathy replies, "the red universe." Chuckie and Haynes have no idea what Kathy is talking about.

Kathy then whispers in Eddie's ear, "we're going to have some fun with this." Kathy whispers the same in Mark's ear. Kathy whispers to Paula, "we're going to have some fun with this until we take them back to the red universe. Play along with me." Wondering what Kathy has in store, Paula whispers back, "sure."

Taking a seat in a patio chair, Kathy tells Eddie, "let him go. Put both of them on the ground, in front of me. If they move, either kick the shit out of them or drown them. Your choice." Chuckie and Haynes are seated ten feet in front of Kathy. Eddie and Mark stand behind the two trespassers, making sure they behave themselves.

Kathy asks Paula, "may I have the necklace, please?" Paula replies, "yes, Your Highness." Eddie and Mark have a hard time not laughing. It's a good thing they are standing behind Chuckie and Haynes. Kathy asks, "Haynes! Where did you get this stone?" Haynes replies, "I'm not telling you!" Paula sternly asks Haynes, "is that any way to speak to the Star-Läufer?" Haynes replies, "what are you talking about?" Paula tells Haynes, "as we told you before, we are from the ancient civilization of Luschka, and we have superpowers. I suggest you answer the Star-Läufer, or we'll put a nerve replicator in your head. Or, would you prefer a brain

scrambler?" Eddie and Mark smile, knowing the girls are definitely up to something.

Haynes immediately goes into a panic, and rapidly exclaims, "okay, okay, okay! I followed you to the middle school, and I found the stones! I watched you from behind a tree. Then, I looked for my own stones." Kathy calmly asks, "how many more stones have you stolen from the ruins of the ancient village of Luschka?" Haynes, now hyperventilating and sobbing, replies, "none! That's the only one! I promise!" Now getting somewhere, Kathy asks, "how did you get here?" Haynes sobs, and explains, "we put three rocks on the ground, like you do, and said, 'take us to Eddie's house.'"

Paula announces, "may I have a private word with the Star-Läufer?" Kathy sternly tells Chuckie and Haynes, "do not move!" Kathy tells Eddie and Mark, "if they move, you know what to do," leaving great uncertainty to what may happen if they disobey. Eddie whispers to Mark, "if they move, we turn the pool into a vat of acid, and throw them in." Mark whispers back, telling Eddie, "I don't know what Kathy and Paula are up to, but it's kind of funny."

Kathy, the Star-Läufer, gets off her throne, and walks over to Paula, where they cannot be heard. Paula whispers to Kathy, "she found a yellow stone, so it took them to your house, but in the yellow universe. She has no idea that she jumped universes." Kathy whispers back, "I think you're right!" Kathy asks, "by the way, what's a Star-Läufer?" Paula giggles, and whispers, "I think it means 'track star' or 'running star' in German, but I could be slightly wrong with my translation."

Kathy resumes her position on her throne, and announces, "now, now, little Chuckie! What are you doing here?" Chuckie replies, "nothing." Kathy replies, "wow! I can't believe their disobedience. Paula, please place a nerve replicator in their heads." As Paula approaches, answering for Chuckie, Haynes screams out, "Charles was going to put soap in your pool! It was a joke!" Kathy calmly replies, "dealing with the civilization of Luschka is no joke. If you haven't noticed by now, your petty rules do not apply to us." Using her earlier wording, Kathy announces to Chuckie and Haynes, "do not move!" Kathy again tells Eddie and Mark, "if they move, you know what to do."

Kathy and Paula walk to the other side of the pool, where they discuss how to dispose of Chuckie and Haynes. Kathy tells Paula, "you were right. They have to be from the red universe. Me, in the red universe, put a so-called nerve replicator in the bitchkrieg's head." Paula suggests, "we should just take them back to the red universe and dump them off there." Kathy replies, "yeah. That sounds good. But, we have to tell us in the red universe what happened." Paula replies, "no doubt. But we got to scare

the shit out of them first.” Kathy points out, “I think we already did that.” Kathy then tells Paula, “I’m going to go inside and get my necklace. Mind my throne for me.” Paula laughs, and replies, “I’d be glad to.” Kathy then heads inside to get her necklace with red, blue, and yellow stones.

Paula sits on Kathy’s throne, and comments, “now, what am I going to do with you two?” Haynes cries, begging Paula, “just let us go! We’ll just go home!” Paula sternly tells Haynes, “go home? You have no idea how to get home! Do you think you can walk down the street and get home?” Haynes ignorantly replies, “yeah!” Paula tells Haynes, “wow! You have a lot to learn.” Mark comments to Eddie, “their little trip here didn’t quite go as planned.” Paula sits back, announcing, “let me think about this.”

Kathy returns with her necklace, and Eddie comments, “it looks like it’s time to dispose of them.” Kathy commands Chuckie and Haynes, “you two, stand up.” Kathy then commands them, “follow me,” as she walks out of the pool area to the marble slab behind the Jasmine wall. Kathy and Paula lead, followed by Chuckie and Haynes. Acting a bit like Bad Dog and Mad Dog, Eddie and Mark follow closely behind.

Arriving at the marble slab, Kathy announces, “everyone, please stand on the transporter.” Eddie shoves Chuckie, who put up a little resistance, onto the marble slab. With everyone now on the marble slab, Kathy quietly announces, “blue universe, wherever Haynes is now.” The group is transported to Haynes’ front yard, in the blue universe. As they walk off the slab that was transported with them, Kathy tells Chuckie, “go, and knock on the door. Tell that Terry Haynes bitch to get her ass out here now.” Haynes exclaims, “I’m right here!” Kathy tells Haynes, “oh, what you don’t know.”

Chuckie, who is afraid of disobeying, knocks on the front door. The door opens, and Haynes’ counterpart in the blue universe, seeing Chuckie, asks, “what’s going on?” With a quiver in his voice, Chuckie replies, “they said you better come out here.” Hearing the fear in Chuckie’s voice, Haynes’ counterpart in the blue universe asks Chuckie, “is something wrong?” Chuckie, who is shaking like a leaf in the wind, replies, “yeah. I’m really scared.” Chuckie and Haynes’ counterpart walk out to the front lawn, where Haynes, originally from the red universe, meets her counterpart from the blue universe.

Haynes’ counterpart exclaims, “what’s going on here? That’s me!” Kathy replies, “shut up.” Kathy then tells Haynes from the red universe, “I told you, you little moron. We are from Luschka. We have powers far beyond your comprehension.” Kathy then asks Haynes from the red universe, “do you remember when I put that nerve replicator in your head, and you thought there were two of you?” Haynes cries, and replies, “yeah!” Kathy tells Haynes, “well, there’s the other you. Now, unless you

do what I say, you're getting another nerve replicator." Haynes, from the red universe, screams out, "no! Please! This can't be happening!" Haynes, from the blue universe, gets weak in her knees, and falls to the ground.

Kathy tells Haynes' counterpart from the blue universe, "I'm done with you. Get off the ground, and get back inside the house. Now!" Full of fear, Haynes' counterpart from the blue universe finds the strength to run inside, lock the door, and hides in her bedroom closet.

Kathy then announces, "everyone, please step back onto the transporter." With everyone back on the marble slab, they are immediately transported to Eddie and Kathy's back yard. Kathy asks Chuckie and Haynes, "any questions?" Haynes, now in tears, replies, "please! Please take me back home!" Kathy replies, "sure. I'll take you home."

Kathy whispers, "red universe, my house." The group is transported to Kathy's house in the red universe. Looking over the Jasmine wall, Eddie whispers to Kathy, "good. We're sitting by the pool, alone." Kathy replies, "perfect." Kathy tells everyone, "follow me." Kathy and Paula again lead the group. With no choice in the matter, Chuckie and Haynes follow. Eddie and Mark follow behind, making sure they do not escape.

Walking into the pool area, Kathy announces to her counterpart in the red universe, "look what I found!" Having a full-blown panic attack, Haynes tells Chuckie, "this isn't happening! Please, tell me this isn't happening! There's two of them!" All Chuckie can do is to reply, "I'm really, really scared!" Mark asks Chuckie, "why, junior? You said you wanted to go home. So, now you're home."

Kathy tells Chuckie and Haynes, "you two! Sit on the ground." Chuckie and Haynes sit on the ground, scared out of their minds. Kathy's counterpart from the red universe asks, "what happened?" Taking the necklace she found around Haynes' neck out of her pocket, Kathy tells her counterpart, "we caught her in our universe with this." Quickly figuring out what happened, Kathy's counterpart replies, "oh, shit. That is not good."

Kathy explains, "we took her to the blue universe, where the bitchkrieg met her counterpart. Then, we took her back here." Kathy then whispers, "we threatened her with a nerve replicator or a brain scrambler if she didn't talk. She almost lost it. Well, on second thought, she did lose it." Kathy's counterpart whispers back, "if that's the case, she's definitely from my universe. In my universe, Haynes is one big thermonuclear bitch." Kathy and Paula then explain the circumstances around leading up to the moment, including that Kathy is the Star-Läufer.

Chuckie and Haynes listen in on the conversation, trying to figure out what is going on.

Kathy's counterpart from the red universe takes a seat on the patio chair in front of Chuckie and Haynes, announcing, "what gifts have you two idioten brought to me?" Paula giggles, and whispers to Kathy, "she just called them morons in German." Kathy whispers to Paula, "how come she knows German and I don't?" Paula whispers back, "she has a Ph.D. You have to take a foreign language to get a doctorate degree. I guess she took German." Meanwhile, on the ground, Chuckie and Haynes are sobbing, babbling, "can't we just go home?"

Off to the side, Eddie, Mark, and Eddie's counterpart in the red universe watch the entertainment. Observing that Chuckie is crying like a baby, Eddie suggests to Kathy's counterpart, "maybe we should just kick Chuckie's ass, and get it over with." Kathy's counterpart replies, "that would be far too lenient of a punishment for entering the nation of Luschka. This has been a serious transgression. I'm considering nerve replicators or brain scramblers. Perhaps both."

Hearing much about a brain scrambler, but not knowing what it is, Haynes cries out, "what's a brain scrambler? What does it do?" Making up total bullshit, Kathy's counterpart replies, "that's simple. Everything in your brain will be completely scrambled. All of your memories will be jumbled together. So, when you go to the Chuckie's house, you might think he's the dentist, and tell him to change the oil in your car so you can wipe your butt with a tree branch." Catching on, Paula tells Haynes, "seriously! A brain scrambler is much worse than a nerve replicator. And, once a brain scrambler is put in, it can't ever be taken out."

As Kathy's counterpart continues to work Chuckie and Haynes over, Paula whispers to Kathy, "I haven't heard anything this funny since we went to Hawaii, and talked about my poor little helpless sister, who is sitting somewhere in the middle of the Amazon jungle waiting for Mr. Frazier to rescue her." Kathy turns around and laughs, whispering back, "yeah! And the javelin thrower, Johnny Spears." Paula holds herself, trying not to giggle.

Kathy's counterpart announces, "I have thought about this, and I have come to a decision." Paula asks, "what is your decision, Star-Läufer?" Kathy's counterpart informs Chuckie and Haynes, "I am going to send you two idioten home. But, if we ever catch either of you idioten with a Katarinium stone again, you will both receive a nerve replicator. Am I understood?" Haynes cries, and exclaims, "yeah, yeah! Please, I just want to go home!" Eddie again comments, "wow! Now, she's really sounding like Goldshit with all this 'yeah, yeah' shit."

Whispering to Kathy, Kathy's counterpart asks, "may I please borrow your necklace?" Kathy hands her the necklace, replying, "my pleasure." Kathy's counterpart puts on the necklace, stands up, and tells Chuckie and Haynes, "follow me." Chuckie, getting a bit annoyed being told to follow people around, exclaims, "can't we just go home? Please?" Kathy's counterpart replies, "yes. I'm taking you to your home. Follow me." Kathy's counterpart stands, leading Chuckie and Haynes to the marble slab. Eddie's counterpart follows, ready to take action should either Chuckie or Haynes decide to bolt.

Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula, not being able to walk into the portal without being immediately transported home, sit by the pool and wait. Paula asks, "I wonder where she's going to take them." Mark replies, "she said she was going to take them home." Paula informs Mark, "I wouldn't bet on it. That would be way too easy."

During their conversation, Kathy then surmises, "we definitely have a problem here. If they're universe hopping, they can cause a lot of problems." Paula replies, "yeah, seriously. Who knows who else they told about the stones. What if Goldshit and the Harmon sisters also know about the portal?" Kathy exclaims, "crap! This is a bigger problem than I thought."

Hearing Kathy's last comment, Kathy's counterpart walks up and replies, "no, it's not that big of a problem. I took care of her." Kathy asks, "what did you do with her?" Kathy's counterpart explains, "so, this is what happened. I told the portal to take us to the sanitarium over on Central Avenue. We walked inside, and told the attendant that we found Chuckie and Haynes on the streets. Then, we explained that they think they can be transported from one place to another, and they're afraid of having a nerve replicator or a brain scrambler placed into their head."

Kathy laughs, and asks, "so, what did the attendant say?" Kathy's counterpart explains, "he told us, 'we're familiar with those two. They've been in here before.' So then, when Haynes was standing there, she begged the attendant to let her inside. And, Chuckie had no idea where he was or how he got there. So, I'm thinking that Haynes, not Chuckie, knows how the stones work." Paula tells Kathy's counterpart, "you're going to have to keep an eye on them." Kathy's counterpart replies, "yeah, I know. And, I'm going to have to scour that rocky outcropping for all the stones. I can't let them find any more."

Now curious, Kathy asks her counterpart, "how is this not a big problem?" Kathy's counterpart explains, "I have an idea of when she saw me looking for more stones. I'll just go back in time, and tell myself to not look for stones on that day. Then, she'll never see me find them, and never look for them herself. So, none of this would have ever happened."

And, from now on, the last thing I'm going to do is drive to the middle school and leave my car there. That's probably how she knew to follow me." Kathy replies, "perfect! I'd hate to think we'd be spending the rest of our lives chasing that group around the universes." Paula comments, "yeah, seriously."

After catching up on their respective universes, Kathy tells her counterpart, "thank you for taking care of this for us. We have a party to get to, so we have to get going." Kathy's counterpart replies, "no problem. I'll let you know what happens the next time we meet." Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula return to their universe, picking up where they left off.

Walking around the pool area, Kathy asks, "okay. So, now where were we?" Eddie replies, "you were going to check the skimmers, and I was going to check the water." Mark comments, "I was about to cut the lawn before you guys called." Eddie replies, "your yard is all hardscape or natural!" Mark tells Eddie, "I have about 200 square feet of lawn near the front door." Paula mentions, "I have a load of laundry going. Lucky me." Kathy reassures everyone, "wow! It sounds like we all have a normal life now." Paula replies, "not after this morning, girl. There's nothing normal about that." Mark and Paula head home to finish their errands, and will be back later for the party.

Kathy checks the skimmers and announces, "good news! No dead frogs!" Eddie replies, "awesome! And, the pool chemistry is good." Kathy opens the umbrellas to the tables, and tells Eddie, "I think we're okay outside." Eddie asks, "what else is left inside?" Kathy replies, "nothing. I put everything out last night. All we need is to take out the drinks when the guests and pizza arrive." Kathy asks, "so, I guess it's time to head to the station to pick up Paula and Mark's Bus?" Eddie replies, "yeah. Let's do that now." Eddie and Kathy head over to the service station to pick up the Volkswagen Bus, which Eddie and Bobby B. finished late last week.

Around 11:00 a.m., Mark and Paula drive up the driveway in their Dune Buggy. Eddie, at the detached garage, is checking over Mark and Paula's bus one more time. Mark suddenly stops at the detached garage. Paula jumps out of the Dune Buggy, and exclaims, "it's all done!" Eddie replies, "yeah. I finished it late last week. It runs really good." Mark parks the Dune Buggy, and joins Eddie and Paula.

Eddie asks Mark and Paula, "do you guys want to take it for a test drive?" Without hesitation, Paula replies, "yeah! We're going on a test drive, and I'm driving." Eddie hands Paula the keys, and tells her, "see you in a while." Paula, who has driven Kathy's Volkswagen Bus several times, gets behind the wheel. Mark gets in, and Paula drives away.

By late morning, everyone has arrived. Paula and Mark are back from their test drive, and the core group of the tribe is together. While waiting for the pizza to be delivered, everyone relaxes by the pool. Eddie gives the good news that the town has been officially dissolved, and that the county police will be taking over the building on October 1. This is good news to Mark and Bobby B., who live in the area, because their tax bill will be cut in half, and Captain Hayes will literally be right around the corner.

Along the course of discussing politics, Eddie mentions, “they should limit politicians to two terms. One term in office, and the other in prison.” Mark replies, “ain’t that the truth. Who knows how much money that Jamieson clown stole from us.” Eddie informs Mark and Bobby B., “John Davies is working on that. Jamieson’s bank accounts are locked down. If there’s any money to get back, he’ll get it for us.” Mark replies, “good. It’s not that I need the money. I just don’t want Jamieson to have it.”

While they are on the subject of money, Johnson asks Eddie, “how’s the stock market looking for the next year?” Eddie explains, “for the next year, it looks like it’s going to decline. But, I’m not worried about it.” Eddie is not worried about his stock picks because he travels to the future to see which stocks will increase in value most. Using Eddie’s methodology, he cannot lose.

Johnson mentions, “what’s all this I hear about annuities and something called a 401K?” Eddie asks, “where did you hear about that?” Johnson replies, “some of the teachers at the high school are always talking about how their retirement plans are doing. They have money taken out of their paycheck every month.” Eddie explains, “you don’t want to mess with something like that, especially a 401K. You’re not seeing any of that money until you retire. You’d be better off buying a house and renting it out. Or, buy a utility stock that pays high dividends. That’s what Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde both do. Then, you can start collecting your retirement check now.”

Braden, who has been acting on Eddie stock advice, mentions, “we got something like that over at the University too. I ain’t messing with it. It don’t make no sense to me to put all that money away until I retire when I can be making money now. And, that means I can spend it now.” Wendy asks Braden, “so, when are we going to the Florida Keys again?” Braden replies, “whenever we want. See? That’s exactly my point! If I put all that money away in a 401K, we ain’t gonna get to the Keys until I retire.”

Eddie asks Braden, “by the way, how’s your house coming along, bro?” Braden replies, “Mark got the hardwood floors in, and he replaced all the appliances. And, the inside is all painted. And, your brother about has the landscaping done.” Wendy mentions, “I’m so glad we got rid of that ugly light in the kitchen.” Kathy laughs, and tells Wendy, “that’s the first

thing we got rid of out of this place! The kitchen light was so ugly!” Wendy replies, “I’ll never get it. They put a beautiful chandelier in the dining room, nice fixtures in the bathrooms, and a stupid looking florescent fixture in the kitchen.”

Continuing where he left off, Braden tells the group, “we’ll be moving furniture in sometime soon. After our wedding, it will be all ready to move into.” Wendy comments, “sixty-three more days.” Wendy has obviously been counting down the days to her wedding. Paula exclaims, “wow! That’s coming up faster than I thought!” Kathy mentions, “I’m just glad it’s after I have my baby. I just hope that my dress fits.” Paula panics, and exclaims, “I was measured when I was one month pregnant! My dress isn’t going to fit!” Kathy tells Paula, “you haven’t picked up your dress yet. Tell them to make it one size bigger around the waste. You’ll be fine.” Paula sighs, and replies, “I hope you’re right.”

Quietly sitting with the group, Mitchell comments, “wow! We’re all beginning to sound like adults now.” Mark tells Mitchell, and everyone else around, “this is the moment you’ve been waiting for your whole life.” Eddie asks, “does that mean we have to behave ourselves now?” Mark replies, “no. I just have to find new people to mess with.” Johnson points out, “yeah. That’s because everyone you’ve ever messed with is in jail now.” Paula laughs, and adds, “that’s because Mark messed up their minds forever!” Rattling off a few names of people he’s messed with in the past, Mark comments, “let’s see. There are four McCrutchens, Jimmy O’Brien, Mr. O’Brien, Chuckie, Goldshit, Mr. Crum, Dean Grimsby, wow! You’re right! They’re all in jail.” Johnson replies, “of course, I’m right!”

Kathy quickly points out, “Chuckie isn’t in jail. He’s in a sanitarium.” Braden tells Kathy, “there ain’t no difference. His ass is locked up. It’s not like his ass can just get up and walk out of there anytime he wants.” Wendy tells Braden, “yeah. It’s not like they can lock his ass up and not the rest of him too. The rest of his body will have to follow his ass. And, it’s not like his ass can leave all by itself.” Paula points out, “if the rest of his body follows his ass, he’d be walking backwards.” Everyone laughs at Wendy’s interpretation of Braden’s remarks, not quite expecting a comment like that out of Wendy today.

At around noon, the pizza arrives. Eddie, Kathy, and a few others go to help Arianna unload the van. Paula runs inside to get some plates and cups. Since it is nice outside and only a few guests are gathered today, it is decided to eat outside by the pool.

Over lunch, Kathy asks Barbara, “how’s the team looking this year at the high school?” Barbara replies, “we’re definitely expecting to have a good year, especially with the seniors taking track and field at the University with Mr. Frazier and Athena.” Eddie mentions, “I bet they’re

looking forward to that.” Barbara replies, “I agree. It’s not everyone who gets a chance to train with a University track team and a coach like Mr. Frazier.” Eddie replies, “I meant getting out of high school for a few hours a day.” Barbara laughs, telling Eddie, “when I was in high school, I would have relished the chance to get out of that place, if even for a few hours.”

Tessa asks Braden, “speaking about high school, how is Mr. Crum doing these days?” Braden replies, “if you ask me, they really ought to transfer his ass to some other prison.” Wendy points out, “and, the rest of his body too. You can’t put his ass in one prison and the rest of him in another one.” Braden laughs, and continues, “I’m not so sure about that! They probably kick his ass so hard in there that it flies right off his body!” Wendy asks, “which ass? The one on top of his legs, or the one on top of his neck?” Braden tells Wendy, “I don’t see no difference between the two!”

Finishing his story, Braden continues, “so, as I was saying, my father says Mr. Crum gets his ass kicked in there every day. So, to get out of his ass kicking, he’s always complaining that he’s sick. Then, they have to drag his flimsy ass to sick bay. That’s his hideout. It’s the only place he doesn’t get his fat ass kicked.” Erika comments, “he’s sick, all right. He’s sick in the head.” Erika, whom Mr. Crum was constantly badgering about something, remembers life at the high school quite well.

Mark warns Eddie, “you’d better watch out. When Mr. Crum gets out of prison, he’s going to come after you. He’s going to want his house back. And, he’s going to want his Volkswagen Beetle back too.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “you mean, ‘if he gets out of prison.’” Braden then reveals, “the bad news is his ass is eligible for probation in four or five years, if he makes it that long.” Johnson observes, “wow! He’ll get out just in time for our ten-year reunion.” Just the thought of Mr. Crum showing up at the class’ ten-year reunion causes everyone to break out in laughter.

During the laughter, Kathy whispers to Paula, “what’s gotten into Wendy today?” Paula whispers back, “I don’t know. She’s usually kind of quiet.” Kathy replies, “not today.” Paula whispers, “maybe she’s all energetic because Braden graduated, and they’re getting married.” Kathy whispers back, “that could be.” Paula whispers, “ask her what’s up.”

Kathy blurts out, “hey, Wendy! What’s up?” Wendy replies, “about what?” Kathy laughs, and replies, “you’re a bit out of character today.” Wendy smiles, and tells Braden, “see? What did I tell you?” Braden replies, “okay, I’ll let you win this one.” Kathy asks, “are we missing something here?” Braden replies, “yeah. Wendy’s somehow thinking that I use the word ‘ass’ way too much, and our kids are gonna be running around

telling everyone, 'I'm gonna kick your ass' or 'his ass is in prison.'" Mark comments, "she might be right about that, bro."

Braden explains, "the way I see it, it's easier to teach the kids to be the chief ass kicker in their sport than it is to change the way they talk." Wendy points out, "what do you mean, 'the way they talk'? Their asses haven't even been born yet!" Coming to his defense as everyone laughs, Braden exclaims, "that don't matter none! They're still gonna talk like everyone else in school." Wendy laughs, seeing that Braden totally missed her use of the word 'ass' in her last statement. Mark tells Braden, "I see your point, bro. You certainly don't want to raise any wimps, like Jimmy O'Brien." Eddie adds, "yeah. That wouldn't be good."

Braden asks everyone, "you guys know what's gonna happen when they lock Mr. O'Brien and Jimmy O'Brien up, don't you?" Mark asks, "what's going to happen to them?" Braden explains, "when they get to prison, somebody's gonna make them their slave. Their owner is gonna rent them out for candy bars and anything else they can get. The O'Brien and O'Brien maid service is gonna be making beds and cleaning the other inmate's toilets for them. As long as they do what they're told, they'll be protected. If their asses fall out of line, they'll get their ass kicked by their owner. Then, somebody else will pick them up as a slave. If they become snitches, they're gonna get roughed over real good, just like Mr. Crum. In a prison, snitches get stitches." Mark comments, "I guess that's the price you pay for messing with people's scholarships."

On the subject of law enforcement, Eddie curiously asks Braden, "how is Terry Haynes doing? Is she still in jail?" Braden replies, "yeah. From what I hear, she ain't getting out early. They put her ass in with the rough crowd. She's gonna be doing a lot of time for pulling a gun on an officer's daughter." Eddie was asking only to obtain validation of what Captain Hayes relayed earlier. Eddie is now satisfied that Haynes, who entered Eddie's pool area earlier with Chuckie, is from the red universe.

With the subject of Haynes brought up, Hoffer comments, "I wish the Chuckie weren't British. I hate to think that jerk is from the same country that I'm from." Tessa, who is half German and half British, replies, "yeah, seriously. The Chuckie must have gotten all the bad genes. We got the good ones." Mark asks Tessa, "are you saying that the Chuckie is genetic junk?" Tessa replies, "exactly. Genetic junk. Only someone who is genetic junk would throw a javelin at someone." Eddie comments, "I remember that day. There's definitely something wrong with that guy." Braden exclaims, "I remember that day too! That was the best ass kicking that ever came down!" Johnson comments, "and, we've seen a couple of really good ass kickings in our lives. But, that one takes the cake." Braden replies, "ain't that the truth!"

Mark shakes his head, and mentions, “there must be something really wrong with the Chuckie. That guy has way too many problems.” Braden is quick to reply, “Chuckie’s only got one problem. His only problem is that he’s still alive. Every time his ass shows up somewhere, someone’s kicking it. He’s just like McCrutchen. He probably wakes up in the morning, looks in the mirror, and asks himself, ‘I wonder how I’m gonna get my ass kicked today.’ One of these days, his ass is gonna run into the wrong person.” Mark laughs, telling Braden, “you might be right about that.”

With the subject on the past, Kathy reminisces, “you know, when we pulled all that Amazon women crap, that coach, what’s his name, must have been really stupid.” Johnson interjects, asking, “do you mean Mr. Ruff?” Kathy replies, and continues, “yeah. Mr. Ruff, Mr. Lyons, and Mr. Parker. Those guys must have been really stupid. None of us even look like we’re from the Amazon.” Barbara mentions, “I, for one, am from Britain. My accent kind of gives it away.” Johnson tells Barbara, “yeah. You don’t even look like you’re from the Amazon.”

Paula mentions to everyone, “wow! We’ve been together as a group for almost a decade, and I never knew Tessa was half German and half British!” Tessa suggests, “maybe we should go around the table and everyone could tell us where they’re from.”

Revealing what everyone already knows, Paula replies, “I’m Italian. From both sides, I’m Italian. And, a calzone is still a pizza, no matter how you cut it.” Kathy relents, and tells Paula, “okay. I’ll let you win this one.” Paula replies, “that’s because I’m right.” Mark asks Paula, “are you sure the name Giovanni isn’t from the Amazon?” Paula laughs, and replies, “not in this universe!”

Tessa asks Kathy, “what nationality is Karakova? I’ve never known anyone else with that name.” Kathy replies, “I’m the enemy. My family is originally from the U.S.S.R. So, when you hear the Russians are going to blow us up, that would be me.” Everyone laughs as Kathy continues, “but, some of my ancestors are from Eastern Europe.” Eddie comments, “I guess that makes me the enemy too. My family is originally from Russia, but my grandparents lived and worked in Eastern Europe. Then, they came to this country.” Bobby B. points out, “I remember when we had all those air raid drills, and they told us it was because of the Russians.” Eddie replies, “yeah, bro! That was me and Kathy!”

Paula tells Mark, “Mark, tell everyone where you’re from.” Mark replies, “everyone knows where I’m from.” Erika comments, “I don’t.” Paula announces, “Mark’s family is originally from Czechoslovakia.” Correcting Paula, Mark tells everyone, “it’s the Czech Republic.” Bobby B. comments, “that sounds too much like the Chuck Republic, like in the

Chuckie.” Mark quickly replies, “the Chuck Republic is over there on Central Avenue, where the sanitarium is.” Kathy laughs, and adds, “yeah! That whole sanitarium is the Chuck Republic!”

Braden then comments, “I bet nobody can guess where I’m from.” Johnson replies, “you’re probably from the same place I’m from.” Braden reveals, “I’m from some place in Africa. But, I don’t know exactly where.” Johnson replies, “yeah. Me too.” Braden announces, “wherever the ass kicking capitol is in Africa, that’s where I’m from.” Wendy laughs, and tells Braden, “I would have never guessed.”

Braden asks, “does anybody think they know where Wendy’s from?” Wendy replies, “I do.” Braden laughs, and replies, “yeah. But, you don’t count.” Wendy replies, “one. Two. Three. Four. I count.” Wendy then announces, “I’m from the British Isles, mostly from England.” Tessa observes, “so far, Britain is winning.”

Kathy asks, “who’s next?” No one volunteers, so Mark comments, “it should be obvious where Bobby B. is from.” Tessa replies, “with a name like Bradshaw, he sounds British.” Bobby B. laughs, and quickly replies, “you’re not even close.” Most people sitting around the table know Bobby B’s. nationality or, more specifically, race. But, there are a few who apparently do not. Bobby B. announces, “Bradshaw isn’t even my real last name.” Tessa asks, “give us a hint. What is your real last name?” Bobby B. replies, “it’s Bar-Kahn. My grandparents chose to be renamed at Ellis Island.” Tessa thinks for a moment, and tells Bobby B., “that doesn’t help me any.” No one who doesn’t know seems to know, so Mark spills the beans, announcing, “Bobby B. is Jewish.” Tessa exclaims, “I never knew that! Then, how come you go to church?” Bobby B. replies, “I’m a Messianic Jew. I follow Jesus.”

Kathy then asks, “okay. So, who’s left?” Paula replies, “Mitchell, Amber, and Erika.” Mitchell announces, “I’ll give you guys a hint. Me and Barbara aren’t the same.” Mark comments, “I can see that. You’re a guy and she’s a girl. And, you have a first name for your first and last names. Barbara doesn’t.” Eddie recalls, “when we were in school, in the beginning of the year when the teachers would call the attendance, some of the teachers called him Mitchell Gary.” Amber tells everyone, “the same thing happened to me.” Mark asks, “what? They called you Mitchell Gary?” Amber laughs and replies, “no! The teachers called me Amy Amber.” Mark asks, “so, what is your ancestry, anyway?” Amber replies, “I’m a WASP, a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. And, my family’s ancestry is European, but no specific country. We’re kind of a little bit of everything.”

Amber then tells the story, “in high school, the teachers always messed up my first and last names too. I really got in trouble in Mr. O’Brien’s class once. When he called the roll on the first day, he called

the name Amy Amber. So, I didn't answer. Then he asked, 'does anyone know who Amy Amber is?' And, someone pointed to me, and said, 'she's right there.' So, Mr. O'Brien asked me, 'young lady, are you Amy Amber?' I told him, 'no. I'm Amber Amy. And, if you looked at your class role, I'm sure there's columns that are labeled 'last name' and 'first name'. So, he got all mad and told me that, if I continued with the sarcasm, I was going to end up in the principal's office." Everyone laughs, knowing that Amber's story sounds exactly like Mr. O'Brien.

Wendy announces, "now, it's Erika's turn." Without hesitation, Erika announces, "I'm Austrian." Tessa replies, "I would have expected something else." Erika replies, "nope. Austrian from both sides." Eddie comments, "I guess that explains why she always gets sausage on her pizza." Mark replies, "and, that explains why Paula always wants pepperoni on her pizza." Paula laughs, and asks Mark, "how does that explain anything?" Mark replies, "pepperoni is Italian. It ends in an 'i'." Paula informs Mark, "pizza is Italian. So, anything you put on a pizza still makes it Italian." Mark replies, "oh, yeah. I guess so." Kathy suggests to Mark, "don't argue with her. The Italian in her is in high gear tonight."

Barbara smiles, and asks Mitchell, "how about you Gary Mitchell? Or, was that Mitchell Gary?" Mitchell replies, "everyone knows you're my cousin!" Barbara tells Mitchell, "but, tell them about your other half of the family!" Mitchell replies, "I'm half British heritage, like Barbara. But, my dad is from Jamaica." Barbara informs everyone, "for those of you who may not know, my mother and Gary's mother are sisters, and are from Britain." But, everyone in the group knew that, especially Johnson, who always made it a point to inform Mitchell of Barbara's superior performance while in high school.

Wendy mentions, "I wish we knew all this about each other a long time ago." Mark replies, "yeah, I know. None of us would have known that Braden and Johnson are from Africa unless they told us." Wendy tells Mark, "now, you're being silly." Paula tells Wendy, "Mark is always being silly. He doesn't take too much seriously." Mark replies, "sure I do!" Paula asks, "oh, yeah? Like what?" Mark replies, "like building stuff the right way." Paula sighs, and responds, "okay. I stand corrected."

Braden tells Mark, "I got something else for you to build." Mark asks, "what's that, bro?" Braden explains, "me and Wendy's house is on a half acre. I want you to build a wall around the back yard, like the one you and Eddie have." Mark asks, "why do you want a wall?" Braden replies, "because I'm gonna put in a big patio, a barbeque area, a small pool, and a garden." Mark informs Braden, "we can do that for you."

Braden elaborates, "me and Wendy want a small pool, not a big one like Eddie's. And, it would be really nice to have a storage building in the

back. I don't want the garage filling up with a bunch of shit." Mark recommends, "on the left side of your house, we can put in a second detached garage. There's enough room. We can make the second garage two cars deep. We can tie the wall into the new garage, and put a door in the back so you can keep all your pool stuff in there." Braden replies, "that's a good idea. Why didn't I think of that?" Mark advises Braden, "put the pool in first, bro. Then, put in the hardscape and the garage. The last thing to go in is the wall."

After lunch, the group gets in the water for a while to cool off. Paula, standing in the corner of the pool with Kathy and Barbara, tells Kathy, "I think I'm all ready for your shower. This is like the first baby shower I've thrown. I hope I didn't forget anything." Kathy asks, "did you send out the invitations?" Paula replies, "yeah." Barbara mentions, "I received mine." Kathy tells Paula, "see that? You're all ready. Everything will be just fine."

Kathy mentions, "I just hope the baby doesn't pop out before the shower." Paula assures Kathy, "it won't, girl. Don't jinx it." Kathy mentions, "well, we did have to wait until the University was back in session, and everyone is back from Summer break." Paula tells Kathy, "oh, by the way. Athena is coming to your shower. I got her RSVP the other day." Kathy replies, "that's awesome!" Barbara replies, "oh good! Athena is really nice. I'm so excited that she's coming."

Knowing Athena Leighton for a while now, Paula suggests, "you know, we should invite Athena to some of our parties. She seems really happy when she's with our group." Kathy agrees, stating, "since she's been coaching track, she's really changed. When she's in the ivory tower, she really puts on an administrative persona. But, we've seen the real Athena Leighton. She was quite a different person at the beach that day. And, at track practice, she always seemed to be having fun." Paula mentions, "yeah, I know. I guess she got really tired of playing provost. I'm happy for her that she's going to be teaching and coaching track. It sounds like that's what she really wants to do."

Suddenly remembering they were talking about babies, Paula mentions, "it seems like everyone's getting married. In no time, we're all going to be having babies." Kathy asks Barbara, "have you and Eric set a date yet?" Barbara replies, "we haven't set an actual date yet, but it will be sometime next Summer. We want our anniversary to be at a time when we're not teaching." Paula comments, "that makes a lot of sense." Kathy asks, "how long have you guys been engaged now?" Barbara replies, "two and a half years." Paula comments, "wow! Life is going to be one party after another."

Now curious, Barbara asks Kathy, “when did you and Eddie get engaged?” Kathy replies, “it’s a secret.” Barbara quickly tells Kathy, “come on, girl. Spit it out.” Kathy takes a deep breath, and replies, “okay. You guys can’t laugh, though.” Barbara assures Kathy, “we won’t laugh.” Paula quickly adds, “unless it’s really funny.” Kathy reveals, “me and Eddie got secretly engaged during the Winter of my senior year in high school. But, we didn’t announce it until the next year, at Christmas.” Barbara exclaims, “I never knew!” Kathy replies, “we kept it a secret. So, then me and Eddie got married the Summer after Eddie graduated from high school.”

Paula reminisces, “that was a really tough time. Mr. Crum was always on the warpath.” Kathy replies, “yeah! He was really ticked off because the track team was winning everything, and he couldn’t make any money betting! That’s when he tried to prevent Eddie from graduating.” Barbara points out, “in retrospect, it all makes perfect sense.” Paula comments, “I can’t believe we didn’t see it all back then.” Kathy points out, “all we wanted back then was to be on the track team.” Barbara mentions, “and, we were all teenagers back then. We didn’t know anything about gambling and rigging sporting events.” Paula mentions, “yeah, seriously. It even took Richard a while to put it all together.”

Kathy asks Barbara, “so, did you hear about Officer Hayes?” Barbara replies, “no. What’s going on with Officer Hayes?” Kathy explains, “he got promoted to captain! Oh, and Erika’s father got promoted to police chief.” Barbara exclaims, “that’s awesome! He’s a really good guy.” Barbara then yells over to the other side of the pool, “hey, Erika! Come here for a minute, please.”

Erika swims over, and asks Barbara, “what’s up?” Barbara replies, “I heard your father has been named police chief. Please give him my congratulations the next time you see him!” Erika replies, “yeah. He’s really happy that he got the job. There were a few things going on in the police department that he wasn’t too happy about.”

Now curious, Barbara asks, “really? Like what?” With no shortage of news and opinion, Erika explains, “so get this. He’s going to track down all the drug dealers, and put them in jail, where they should be. That’s why Officer Hayes got promoted to captain, because he’s really good at that. My father and Officer Hayes told the other guy, Chief Hanson, to leave the drug dealers out on the streets for a while so he can watch them and see who their connections are. Chief Hanson never liked that idea. He just wanted to put them away when they caught them. But, my dad and Officer Hayes managed to convince him to not act so swiftly. And, look at what happened.” Kathy tells the group, “yeah. They busted all those dope peddlers, and found out about the gambling ring too!” Erika replies, “yeah. And, if Chief Hanson had his way, Chuckie, Goldshit, and

the rest of them would have been put in jail right away, and Mr. Crum would still be dealing drugs at the high school.” Kathy comments, “I can see that.”

Erika goes on to explain, “and yeah, Kathy. They did the same thing with Dean Grimsby and the gambling ring. My dad and Officer Hayes let them gamble for a while. They watched everything closely for a year. Then, when Officer Hayes had everything figured out, they got the green light and moved in and busted that ring wide open too.” Barbara tells Erika, “it sounds like you’re going to make a great police officer!” Erika smiles, and replies, “I’m putting bullies in jail, like Chuckie.” Paula comments, “you go, girl!” Everyone remembers the altercations between Erika and Chuckie while they were in high school.

On the other side of the pool, Braden is telling a story to a few of the guys about what happened in the dorms over the Summer. On duty at the time of the incident, Braden relates, “a whole bunch of guys in the dorm got together, and synchronized their watches to the second. So, then what they did is all go into different bathrooms, and turn on the water. And, they’re all looking at their watches. Then, at the exact same time, they all turn the water off at once.” Knowing something about plumbing, Mark laughs, and comments, “that couldn’t have ended too good.” Braden continues, “it didn’t. When they shut the water off, the pipes in the walls broke and there was water everywhere! That whole dorm was a mess in no time!”

Johnson asks, “how long did that take to fix?” Braden explains, “it took about two or three weeks. Every time the plumbers thought they were done, another leak would show up. The problem is those guys in the dorm had no water for a few weeks. They had to take a shower and do their business in the dorm next to theirs.” Eddie laughs, and comments, “I bet they won’t do that again.”

Braden explains, “that wasn’t the end of the story. One of the guys, some guy named Casey, had a big mouth, and told everyone what they did. So, the word got around, and Casey got called into the dean’s office. Dean Beckman wanted to know who else was involved. Casey didn’t want to talk, so Dean Beckman told him if he doesn’t reveal who was in on it, his ass is getting expelled. So, the guy squealed, and it turns out there was like two dozen of them.”

Hoffer asks, “did anyone get arrested?” Braden replies, “no. There ain’t no law against two dozen people turning off water at the same time. So, there was nothing that I could do. So, I told Dean Beckman, ‘it looks like this ass kicking is all up to you.’ And, he looked at me and said, ‘ass kicking? That’s a unique way of putting it.’ So, I told him, ‘yeah. If you don’t kick their ass hard enough, they’re just gonna do it again.’ So, all

their asses got put on disciplinary probation. And, they're gonna be picking up trash on the ground at the University all during Fall semester." Hoffer comments, "that's going to look really good in front of all the women during rush week." Braden laughs, and replies, "yeah. And, the frat boys are all gonna find out about it, and make a mess in the streets. Guess who's gonna be cleaning all that shit up." Mark comments, "well, that stunt didn't go exactly as planned."

Hoffer asks, "what else happens around the campus that we don't know about?" Braden laughs, and replies, "you wouldn't believe some of this shit. Once, these two guys get onto the tennis courts at night, when it was dark." Mark informs Braden, "it's always dark at night, bro. That's what makes it night." Laughing along with everyone else, Braden laughs, and continues, "so, they take their tennis ball, and soak it with lighter fluid. Then, one of them set the ball on fire, and they hit the ball back and forth. And, this flaming ball of fire is going back and forth across the tennis court." Mark laughs, and exclaims, "wow! That must have been so weird!"

Braden continues, "so, I pull over, and walk onto the tennis court. I told them, 'you two guys better have a good explanation of why you're playing tennis with a ball that's on fire.' One of the guys steps up, and tells me, 'it's a new sport. It's called fire tennis. If the ball goes out when it's in your court, you give up a point.' I told them, 'who do you think you're 'shittin'? There ain't gonna be no fire tennis played around here. So, you might as well pack up and leave.' Then, the other guy tells me, 'you can't make us leave.' So, I told him, 'oh yeah? We'll see about that!' So, I left, and padlocked the gate shut with them still on the inside. When I was walking back to my car, they started screaming, 'hey! Let us out!' So, then I walk back and, all of a sudden, they both want to leave." Bobby B. comments, "we'll have to try fire tennis sometime." Eddie replies, "yeah. But not around the service station."

Braden then shakes his head, stating, "some of those freshmen are dumber than the Chuckie." Mark asks, "really? That's hard to believe." Braden replies, "yeah. And, I don't even know why they call me out for half the shit that goes on around that University. They ought to have a psychiatrist on call 24 hours a day." Mark asks, "really, bro? What are you talking about?"

Braden explains, "one night, some senior called the police department, and she wanted an officer to come out to one of the dormitory's laundromats. So, I take the call, and get to the laundromat. When I got there, it was no secret who had us called out." Mark asks, "so, what was the problem?" Braden explains, "this girl was ticked off at some guy, and was saying that he messed up her laundry, and she had to do it all over again."

Wondering how one person can mess up another person's laundry, Mark asks, "what did the guy do to her laundry?" Braden explains, "I questioned the guy, who said he walked into the laundromat to do his laundry. He said that, since his parents had a front loading washing machine, he decided to use a front loading washer. So, he put his clothes into the machine, threw his powdered laundry detergent in, and then closed the door. He put his money into the machine and, once it started, he realized he put his clothes and his detergent into a dryer." Mark exclaims, "seriously? What a moron!" Braden replies, "yeah. But, it doesn't end there."

Braden then explains, "now, get this. He takes his laundry out of the dryer, and puts it in a washer, and does his laundry. And, all his laundry detergent is still sitting in that dryer. So, this woman puts her clothes into the dryer that still had a shit load of detergent in it. And, his laundry detergent got all in her clothes, and she had to wash her clothes all over again. So, her ass got bent all out of shape, and she wanted him to pay for her having to do her laundry again."

Mark asks, "so, what did you do?" Braden replies, "I told both of them that stupidity is not a crime, and there's nothing that I can do. Then I told the guy, 'if I were you, I'd give her the money to do her clothes again. If you don't, she's gonna tell everyone on this campus what you did. And, you ain't never gonna live that one down. You're gonna be hearing about that for a real long time.' So, he gave her the money to do her laundry again, and I got out of there as fast as I can. I was afraid that she was going to kick his ass!" Mark laughs, and tells Braden, "that was kind of funny. The guy still sounds smarter than the Chuckie. The Chuckie wouldn't have owned up to it." Braden replies, "you got that right!"

Now curious, Mark asks, "what else happens around the campus?" Eddie replies, "yeah. We wouldn't know. We never went to classes." Braden laughs and, beginning another story, explains, "I was driving by the student center where that three-way stop is. A guy in blue overalls, who looked like a maintenance worker, was removing the stop sign where you come out of the parking lot. So, I radio the station, and ask why the maintenance crew is removing that stop sign. I wanted to know because we just had that sign put up a month earlier." Hoffer comments, "that's probably because there's a wreck at that intersection every month."

Braden continues, "the dispatcher radioed me back, and told me they don't know anything about having that sign removed. So, I pulled over, and questioned his ass. He tells me he's from the maintenance department, and the stop sign is being removed. I asked him, 'is that your truck parked on the sidewalk?' He replies, 'yeah.' So, I asked him, 'if you're from the maintenance department, why is there a calculus book sitting on your front seat?' So, the guy turns out to be a student, and he

was stealing the sign. I threw the book at him. I put his ass away in the tank for the day. And, then I impounded his pickup truck for parking on the sidewalk.” Bobby B. asks, “so, he was stealing the sign in broad daylight?” Braden replies, “yeah. And, if I didn’t happen to be in the area, he would have gotten away with it.”

Eddie laughs, and replies, “if you want to steal something, and it’s out in the open, that’s the way to do it.” Braden agrees, saying, “I know. If we all get dressed up in maintenance uniforms, and walk into the administration building, ain’t no one gonna question us or stop us. We can walk in there with a hand truck, walk into any open office, and wheel out a filing cabinet. And, ain’t no one gonna stop us. But, if you try to pull a job like that at night, you’ll get caught.”

Eddie mentions, “whenever my dad walks into a building with his hard hat on, no one ever dares to question him.” Mark agrees, commenting, “I’ve seen that first hand, especially if you have a clipboard in your hand.” Eddie laughs, prompting Mark to ask, “what’s so funny?” Eddie explains, “my dad hired a painter to do a job once. When the painter was looking over what work had to be done, my dad noticed that, on his clipboard, it was written, ‘walk fast, and look worried.’” Mark laughs, and comments, “I know what I’m writing on my clipboard!” Eddie replies, “yeah, bro. If you walk fast and look worried, they’ll think their getting their money’s worth.”

A bit later, while everyone is tossing a ball back and forth in the pool, Paula throws out the question, “so, what’s next?” Kathy asks, “how do you mean?” Paula replies, “well, we’re all kind of done with track. I’m not sure I want to train for four more years just to go to the Olympics. But, I want to do something.” Forcing someone to ask, Mark comments, “I know what you guys can do.” Kathy asks, “oh yeah? What’s that?” Mark suggests, “all you women can join the roller derby.” Along with the laughter that breaks out, the guys clearly think the women joining the roller derby is a great idea.

Kathy mentions, “when I was in elementary school, the roller derby was on television Saturday afternoon, after the cartoons. If it was raining outside, I would watch. I always thought it was kind of funny.” Paula exclaims, “I know! Right? And, some of those women looked mean!” Kathy recalls, “yeah. I remember once, one skater fell down, and the whole other team tripped over her and landed on her on purpose.”

Eddie, never having a television when he was growing up, asks, “what exactly is the roller derby?” Erika replies, “don’t tell me you’ve never heard of it.” Eddie replies, “I’ve heard of it, but I have no idea what it is.” Mark explains, “it’s two teams of five women on the track on roller skates.

I'm not sure what the rules are, but I think they try to lap each other. I'm not even sure that there are any rules."

Erika tells everyone, "the rules are complicated. But, the only reason anyone watches the roller derby is to wait for a fight to break out." Erika tells Mark, "there's rules, but if your team is way ahead, the rules don't matter to you. That's because, if your way ahead, you can afford the penalty points." Tessa comments, "it sounds like someone around here has looked into this before!" Braden suggests, "it sounds like to me that the roller derby is professional wrestling for women."

Tessa informs everyone, "if we're joining the roller derby, we'll have to come up with names for ourselves." Erika comments, "it sounds like someone else knows a lot about the roller derby, too." Having seen the roller derby before, Kathy suggests, "my name will be Kathy Crusher." Paula claims, "I'm Paula the Pulverizer!" Somewhat familiar with the roller derby, Barbara asks, "how does Barbara the Bouncer sound?" Erika replies, "that's a really good one!" Claiming her name, Tessa announces, "I'll be Train Wreck Tessa." A few more names are thrown around, as the ball is tossed from person to person.

Erika incidently notices a bottle of laundry detergent sitting next to the rock column, and asks, "hey, Kathy. What's your laundry detergent doing outside?" Haynes and Chuckie brought a bottle of laundry detergent from the red universe earlier today, and expected to dump it in the swimming pool. Totally forgetting about the evidence from this morning, Kathy replies, "I was wondering where that was. I totally forgot about it."

Getting back on the subject, Tessa asks Erika, "so, what's your roller derby name going to be?" Erika replies, "mine is Hit and Run. Or, maybe Felony Melanie." Tessa laughs, and exclaims, "someone has definitely thought about this before!" Giving her opinion, Kathy says, "I like Hit and Run." Erika replies, "now that I'm thinking about it, yeah. Hit and Run sounds a lot better."

Later in the evening, when the party winds down, Wendy asks, "when's our next party?" Paula replies, "three weeks from today. It's Kathy's baby shower." Bobby B. suggests, "we can all hit the beach again before then. That doesn't take much planning." Eddie, who has always liked the beach, is quick to second the motion. So, next weekend, right before Johnson and Barbara have to get back to work, everyone will head to the beach again. And, Paula offers to drive anyone wanting a ride in her new Volkswagen Bus.

Right before midnight, most everyone heads out, realizing that they've learned a lot about each other today that they've never knew. Mark and

Paula hang around a little while longer to help Eddie and Kathy clean up around the pool area. Mark and Paula then head out, Mark driving Paula's Dune Buggy, and Paula driving her new Volkswagen Bus.

Once everyone is gone, Eddie kisses Kathy, and tells her, "this is your normal life." Kathy replies, "I like my normal life." Eddie and Kathy get back in the pool, where the water feels warmer now that the air is cooler. Kathy puts her legs around Eddie's hips as he moves around the pool, holding Kathy very tightly. Kathy looks up at the sky, looking for her star, knowing exactly where to find it. Finding Katarina's star where it's always been, Kathy closes her eyes, and tells Eddie, "I love you." Eddie whispers in Kathy's ear, "I love you."

Eddie takes a few laps around the pool with Kathy on his hips and her head on his shoulder. Eddie whispers to Kathy, "are you awake?" Kathy doesn't answer, thereby answering Eddie's question. After taking a few more laps around the pool with Kathy on his hips, Eddie walks up the steps to the sun shelf, and out of the pool. The cooler air wakes Kathy up, who asks, "where am I?" Eddie whispers to Kathy, "we're home. We're going to bed now." Kathy whispers, "yeah. I'm also sleeping for two."

Eddie walks inside, with Kathy by his side. Still half asleep, Kathy, with Eddie's help, does her best to get ready for bed. Eddie and Kathy kiss good night. Eddie turns off the light, and whispers to Kathy, "sweet dreams, sweetie."