

Eddie, The Collegiate Senior

Chapter Two Christmas Break

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The week before Christmas, Dr. Zunde is at home, working on finalizing the field event assignments for both the University and Northside High School. Working alongside Dr. Zunde is Dr. Lynn Amherst, a physics and math teacher at Northside High School. Dr. Zunde and Dr. Amherst have been dating for a while, accidentally discovered by Kathy several years ago. But now, everyone knows of their relationship.

Reviewing the athletes' performance, Dr. Amherst mentions to Dr. Zunde, "as I am looking over these stats, I believe Bobby B. is on track to break the world record in the shot-put sometime this year. If I were to apply a regression analysis to Bobby B's. performance over the last year, I believe, under the right circumstances, he could break the record." Dr. Zunde replies, "I wouldn't put it past him. He's quite an amazing guy."

Thinking about what Dr. Amherst just said, Dr. Zunde asks, "I'm a little curious. What circumstances are you referring to?" Dr. Amherst explains, "it seems that, after a break, Bobby B. is throwing a bit farther than, say, on a Friday." Dr. Amherst hands Dr. Zunde Bobby B's. stats, and tells him, "take a look at the Monday after Thanksgiving break. And, take a look at his stats for every Monday, and compare the throws with the Friday immediately before." Reviewing the statistics, Dr. Zunde comments, "I see that. It appears that he's probably overtraining a little. I'll discuss that with him when we get back in January."

The two most frequent indications of overtraining in any sport are the lack of making forward progress and frequent injuries that do not sufficiently heal. Of the two, lack of forward progress is usually the first to appear. Dr. Zunde has caught on very early that Bobby B. is perhaps training too hard. By adjusting Bobby B's. workout schedule, Dr. Zunde can circumvent the issue of overtraining.

Reviewing a few more statistics, Dr. Zunde comments, "Joe Sepulveda certainly has come a long way since winning State in high school. I suspect he'll do rather well in the divisional meet." Dr. Amherst recommends, "just don't let him fight it out with Akinmola for the gold medal in the high jump. He's not going to beat Akinmola, so there's no point in pushing it too hard. Sepulveda will need all the strength in his legs for the long jump and the triple jump. And, once Akinmola graduates, Sepulveda, who's a sophomore now, will certainly earn his own collection of gold medals." Dr. Zunde replies, "that's a good point. Thank you."

Hearing a truck drive up the driveway, Dr. Amherst asks, "are you expecting a delivery?" Dr. Zunde smiles, and replies, "maybe I'll be lucky and someone sent me a Christmas present." A minute or so later, while Dr. Amherst and Dr. Zunde review the performance statistics for the hammer throwers, Dr. Zunde exclaims, "that's no delivery. Someone's trying to jimmy the back door!" Dr. Zunde instructs Dr. Amherst, "get down, behind the sofa!"

Dr. Zunde picks up a discus sitting on a shelf, and stealthily moves toward the family room. Seeing the perpetrator's reflection in a mirror as he enters the home, Dr. Zunde observes that the intruder is armed with a gun in his back pocket. Emerging from behind a wall, Dr. Zunde surprises and startles his opponent. The perpetrator freezes for a moment, then reaches for his gun. But, the perpetrator is far too late. Dr. Zunde is already into the spin, preparing to launch his discus at the perpetrator. Dr. Zunde releases the discus and, with a perfect shot, strikes the home invader right in the center of his chest. The perpetrator goes down, screaming in pain and gasping for air.

Dr. Zunde walks over to the burglar, not recognizing him. Sliding the gun far from his opponent with his foot, Dr. Zunde is taking no chances. Fortunately, the burglar quickly passes out, still gasping for air. Dr. Zunde yells out to Dr. Amherst, "it's safe, Lynn!"

Dr. Amherst walks into the family room and, seeing the situation, exclaims, "wow! It looks like you won, Gerhard!" Dr. Zunde replies, "it appears that he's no longer up to factory specifications. From what I can see, I would suspect he has a broken sternum, a few broken ribs, and perhaps a collapsed lung." Dr. Amherst suggests, "I'm guessing we should probably call the police." Dr. Zunde calls the police, suggesting they also send an ambulance.

Two police cars arrive, approaching the residence carefully. Seeing the police drive up, Dr. Zunde opens the front door, yelling out, "the situation is under control! But, you'd better tell the ambulance to hurry up! The guy is fading fast!" Officer Hayes walks into the residence, and

Officer Wilson radios the dispatcher, informing them the situation is urgent, and to get the ambulance to the scene quickly.

Dr. Zunde and Officer Hayes walk inside. Dr. Zunde is wondering whether the perpetrator is still alive, as Officer Hayes asks, “tell me what happened.” Dr. Zunde explains, “Lynn and I were going over some last minute assignments for the upcoming track season. I heard someone try to jimmy the back door.” Seeing the burglar laying on the ground, Officer Hayes interrupts, and exclaims, “what happened to him?” Dr. Zunde continues, explaining, “I was just getting to that. I saw, in the mirror, that he had a gun. When he saw me, he pulled his gun, which I thought he would. Then, I greeted him with a discus. He passed out shortly after being hit. And, there he lies.” Officer Hayes comments, “that character doesn’t look too good.”

Seeing the open rear door, Officer Hayes asks, “is this where this character came in?” Dr. Zunde replies, “yes.” Examining the lock, Officer Hayes comments, “he used a bump key. The key is still in the lock. That was kind of stupid of him.” Officer Hayes tells Dr. Zunde, “this is a five-pin cylinder. You should replace it with a high security twelve-pin cylinder. Medeco makes some good high security cylinders. I’d check it out if I were you.” Dr. Zunde replies, “if it will prevent this from happening again, I’ll get right on it.”

As Officer Hayes is removing the wallet from the burglar’s pocket, Officer Wilson walks in, announcing, “the bus is right around the corner.” Officer Hayes tells Officer Wilson, “the perp’s name is Frank Gloom. Why does that name sound familiar?” Officer Wilson replies, “I don’t know. But, Mr. Frank Gloom, here, doesn’t look too good right now.” Officer Hayes tells Officer Wilson, “he stepped in front of an airborne discus. He probably should have been more careful.”

The ambulance pulls up, and the paramedics rush inside. Dr. Zunde informs the paramedics, “I’d be very careful. He likely has a broken sternum, a few broken ribs, and a collapsed lung.” Quickly getting to work, the attending paramedic comments, “his pulse rate is 150, and very weak.” Mr. Zunde informs the paramedic, “that’s definitely not a good sign. His pericardium could be swelling. But, that would be his problem, not mine.” The paramedic asks, “what happened to this guy?” Officer Hayes replies, “he stepped in front of a flying discus. It hit him in the chest, and he went down.” The paramedic exclaims, “ouch!”

As the paramedics are working, Dr. Zunde and Dr. Amherst step outside. Dr. Zunde tells Dr. Amherst, “we weren’t quite expecting this today. Are you okay?” Dr. Amherst replies, “I’m good. Remember, my father was a paramedic. Dinnertime conversation was how he picked up body parts off the street and shipped the parts off in a box to the

hospital.” Breathing a sigh of relief, Dr. Zunde tells Dr. Amherst, “well, I’m certainly glad you’re okay.” Dr. Amherst replies, “after today, we can add another crazy person to the square root of negative one club.”

Taking a look at Mr. Glooma’s van, Mr. Zunde comments, “apparently, Mr. Glooma either works for the water company, or he stole the water company’s van. Being that I don’t even have county water service, I’m going to take a wild guess and say he’s not here on official water company business.” Dr. Amherst replies, “he probably stole the van, just like everything else he claims to own.” Dr. Zunde and Dr. Amherst walk back inside, crossing paths with the paramedics, who are carrying Mr. Glooma out on a stretcher.

Officer Hayes tells Dr. Zunde, “the crime scene unit is on their way. They’ll lift a few prints and take some photos.” Dr. Zunde poses the question, “I wonder how many of my assets Mr. Glooma believes he is entitled to. And, I wonder how much force he believes he is entitled to use in order to take those assets.” Officer Hayes frankly replies, “to answer your first question, this Glooma character is entitled to none of your assets. And, to answer your second question, if he chooses to use deadly force, deadly force would generally be considered in court to be an appropriate counter measure.”

Dr. Zunde asks Officer Hayes, “would Frank Glooma, by any chance, work for the water company?” Officer Hayes asks, “why would you ask?” Dr. Zunde replies, “the insignia on the van outside is that of the town’s water company. I was telling Lynn that I suspect the van is stolen or he works for the water company.” Officer Hayes tells Officer Wilson, “go run the tag, and see what you can find out.” Officer Wilson heads outside, trying to determine whether the van has been stolen.

Officer Hayes asks Dr. Zunde, “how hard did you throw the discus at him?” Dr. Zunde replies, “the discus was probably moving at twenty meters per second when it hit him.” Seeing the look of confusion on the officer’s face, Dr. Amherst tells Officer Hayes, “that would be about 45 miles per hour. And, a discus weighs two kilograms, which is 4.4 pounds.” Officer Hayes replies, “that must have really hurt.” Dr. Zunde comments, “I’m sure it did. I, for one, would hate to be on the receiving end of a 45 mile per hour discus.” Officer Hayes looks over the crime scene with Dr. Zunde, finding nothing unusual, other than the door that was opened.

Officer Wilson returns, and notifies Officer Hayes, “the good news is the van isn’t stolen. I had dispatch check with the water company. They report Frank Glooma is at work right now, reading water meters.” Dr. Zunde informs Officer Wilson, “I can assure you that he wasn’t here to read a water meter. Out here, in this corner of the town, we all have

wells." Officer Wilson replies, "I wasn't aware of that." Dr. Zunde explains, "we're at a little higher elevation here, so they claim we'd have low water pressure. So, none of the houses in the immediate area are connected to the county water system."

Officer Hayes asks Dr. Zunde, "let me ask you this. If school wasn't out for Christmas break, where would you be right now?" Dr. Zunde replies, "at work, obviously. Why?" Officer Hayes replies, "I'm suspecting that this Frank Glooma character broke into your house because he had good reason to believe you were at work, and the house was empty. And, since he works for the town's water company, reading meters, he has a good idea who is home during the day, and who isn't." Dr. Zunde mentions, "that actually makes a lot of sense."

Officer Wilson tells Officer Hayes, "I suspect Glooma is probably responsible for a few other jobs in this neighborhood." Officer Hayes replies, "you're probably right. The MO looks familiar. Daytime break in. Back door. No one expected to be home. Bump key, with no forced entry." Dr. Zunde comments, "it sounds like I'm not the first home to get broken into." Officer Hayes replies, "there's been a few other break ins. But, this Glooma character will be off the streets for a while. We'll see what happens."

Officer Hayes and Officer Wilson instruct Dr. Zunde not to disturb any evidence until the crime scene unit arrives. The officers then get back on patrol. Dr. Zunde and Dr. Amherst, waiting for the crime scene unit to arrive, discuss ways to make the house more secure. Not exactly liking what happened today, Dr. Zunde plans to buy high security deadbolts, and is contemplating having Mark build a wall around his property, similar to the one Mark built for Eddie.

On other fronts, Jimmy O'Brien appeared to have taken Eddie's advice. O'Brien has disposed of his broken down AMC Gremlin, and has purchased a brand-new BMW. Wanting to show Eddie that he's now made it in the world, O'Brien drives into Eddie's Service Station for a fill up. Seeing the BMW pull up to the pumps, Bobby B. walks out to wait on the customer.

O'Brien opens his tinted window and, seeing Bobby B., commands him, "fill it up with the best gas you have, and don't drip any gas on the paint." Bobby B. replies, "sure." As Bobby B. begins to fill O'Brien's tank, O'Brien asks Bobby B., "where's Eddie?" Bobby B. replies, "he's inside, working." O'Brien tells Bobby B., "I bought a new car." Bobby B. replies, "good for you. I bought a new razor and toothbrush." Bobby B.'s nonchalant attitude is clearly beginning to irritate O'Brien, who clearly wants some attention.

O'Brien hands Bobby B. a one-hundred dollar bill, causing Bobby B. to go inside to get change. O'Brien follows Bobby B. into the office, where he is hoping to show off his new car to Eddie. But, Eddie doesn't give a shit about O'Brien nor his car. Eddie is too busy trying to finish Kathy's Volkswagen Bus before Christmas, but it's a long shot. While the Bus is nearly completed, there are a lot of details that still must be addressed.

O'Brien receives his change and, instead of walking back to his car, walks into the service area, yelling out to Eddie, "hey! I got a new BMW." O'Brien is merely looking for Eddie's stamp of approval and to impress Eddie. Walking out from behind the Bus, Eddie replies, "good for you. Have a merry Christmas." Eddie then gets back to work. O'Brien, for some reason, insists that Eddie take a look at it, asking, "did you want to see it?" Eddie replies, "no." O'Brien stupidly asks, "why not?"

Stepping out from behind the Bus, Eddie replies, "because you bought that new BMW with money that you and your crooked father made by gambling." Eddie, raising his voice, continues, "the money you made by gambling was made at the expense of some student losing an athletic scholarship! And, your father is back to failing athletes again! Imagine that. Failing athletes for personal monetary gain. And, your father always talked about what's 'fair'. How is that fair to the athletes who lose scholarships?"

Getting his panties in a wad, O'Brien explains, "I bought my car with the money I made by working!" Eddie replies, "yeah, right. With your job at the burger joint, making two bucks more an hour than minimum wage, you can't afford that car. And, you know it." O'Brien leaves, yelling back to Eddie, "from now on, I'm buying my gas somewhere else." Eddie yells back at O'Brien, "do I sound like I care, junior?" Eddie is quite glad to get rid of O'Brien, and hopes that he never returns.

Christmas Eve brings the entire tribe together again at Dr. Akinmola's church. It was one year ago today that the church had its first service in the new building. Eddie and Kathy drive into the church parking lot, meeting Mark and Paula who are on their way in. Walking through the door into the narthex, they are greeted by Adegunle Akinmola, who announces, "merry Christmas! Come in, my friends! Come in!" Eddie and Kathy both reply, "merry Christmas," as does Mark and Paula.

Bobby B. walks in with Erika, and are greeted by Akinmola. Mark asks Bobby B., "how's the house coming?" Bobby B. replies, "the heat isn't working, there's no water, it's drafty inside and, when it rains, water comes in." Mark laughs, and replies, "that's because all you have is a foundation!" Eddie tells Mark, "I could be wrong, but I think he's messing with you." Mark replies, "that's because he's been hanging around with you at the service station." Eddie tells Mark, "by the way, Jimmy O'Brien is

gambling again.” Mark asks, “how do you know?” Eddie replies, “he bought a new BMW.” The group heads in, taking a seat with other team members.

Dr. Akinmola walks up and, standing in front of the altar, opens the service by announcing to the congregation, “merry Christmas!” The congregation all responds in unison, “merry Christmas!” Dr. Akinmola instructs the congregation, “please turn in your hymnals to hymn number 139, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. Let us all stand as we sing our praises to the Lord.” The organist begins to play, and the congregation sings along with the choir.

Following the hymn, Dr. Akinmola opens with a prayer, and begins reading from the Scriptures. During the reading, Kathy glances over to the other side of the aisle, seeing Mayor Bradford Jamieson sitting in his usual place when he occasionally attends church. Kathy whispers to Eddie, “the mayor is on the other side of the aisle. He’s checking out who’s here, and he’s taking notes.” Eddie whispers back, “maybe he’s taking notes on what Dr. Akinmola is saying.” Kathy replies, “yeah, right. It’s more like he’s probably taking attendance.” Kathy is very suspicious of Mayor Jamieson, and justifiably so. Mayor Jamieson has shown up at church, track meets, and team benches. Two of those three places he has no legitimate business to conduct.

The service moves on, coming to the offering. Kathy occasionally glances in the mayor’s direction. The mayor, for some reason, seems to be preoccupied with taking notes. Seeing the offering plate passed to the mayor, Kathy catches the Mayor removing money from the offering plate rather than presenting an offering to the Lord. Kathy whispers to Eddie, “Mayor Jamieson just stole money from the offering plate!” Eddie looks over at the mayor, who catches Eddie’s eye. Eddie stealthily salutes the mayor, who nods in return. Eddie would have preferred to flip the mayor a bird but, after all, he is in church.

The service comes to an end, and everyone wishes one another a merry Christmas. The tribe hangs around together, where everyone shares their plans for the Christmas holiday. Braden asks Eddie, “what are you and Kathy doing over Christmas?” Eddie replies, “we’re going to the Florida Keys with Mark and Paula. We rented a house for a week. It’s warm there.” Braden tells Eddie, “wow! I wish me and Wendy could go there!” Eddie asks, “what’s stopping you, bro?” Braden thinks for a moment, and replies, “nothing! Now, I’m wondering what I’m doing hanging around here over break!” Eddie tells Braden, “it’s not too late to get a plane ticket.” Wendy tells Braden, “yeah! It’s not too late for us to get a ticket!”

Hearing the conversation, Erika asks Bobby B., “why are we staying here?” Bobby B. replies, “we were going to work on our house.” Coming to Erika’s rescue, Mark tells Bobby B., “no, you’re not. Your foundation has to cure, and you’re not getting any contractors out there in the next week anyway. They all have the week off. So, take the week off, bro!” Erika tells Bobby B., “so, if we can’t work on our house right now, we might as well go on vacation too!” Bobby B. asks Erika, “so, where do you want to go?” Erika replies, “the Keys sound good to me. It’s probably warm there.”

Kathy whispers to Eddie, “the house we rented has four bedrooms, and sleeps eight. They can stay with us.” Eddie whispers back, “that would be fine.” Kathy then offers to Braden, Wendy, Bobby B., and Erika, “the house we rented has four bedrooms, and sleeps eight. You guys can join us, if you want to. We have the house until January 3.” Wendy tells Braden, “we’re going!” Hearing Wendy’s excitement, Erika tells Bobby B., “so are we!” Erika tells Kathy, “thank you guys very much!” Kathy mentions, “all you guys have to do now is to get your plane tickets. Fly into Miami, rent a car, and drive down to the Keys. Call me later tonight, and I’ll give you guys the address and directions to the house.”

As they are walking out, Kathy tells Eddie, “I’m glad they didn’t ask us when our flight was.” Eddie replies, “yeah, seriously. We’re taking the portal to get there. And, you’ll get to drive a stock Volkswagen Bus. Then, you can compare it with your new Bus.” Kathy tells Eddie, “that was so nice of the owner to let us use his Bus while we’re down there.” Kathy suddenly asks, “so, when’s my bus going to be ready?” Eddie replies, “all I have left to do is the wheel alignment and a few other minor things.”

Walking to their car, Eddie is intercepted by Mayor Bradford Jamieson. Mayor Jamieson asks Eddie, “can we talk for a moment?” Quite curious what the mayor wants, Eddie replies, “sure. What’s up?” The mayor tells Eddie, “let’s walk over here,” moving to the side of the church building away from the crowd. Kathy walks with them, and the mayor raises no objection.

The mayor opens the oddly and abruptly called meeting by stating, “I checked the court records, and found out that you donated the land for this church.” Eddie replies, “so what? There’s no law against buying a piece of property, and giving it to a church.” The mayor agrees, telling Eddie, “I understand. This land was very expensive. Mechanics don’t make that kind of money. I know that. You know that. And, there’s also your house and the service station.” Quick with his standard explanation, Eddie bluntly tells the mayor, “I made the money in the stock market.” Eddie and Kathy suspect the mayor has an ulterior motive. Eddie plans to play along to discover what the mayor’s real motive is.

The mayor has done a lot of research. He has found out that Eddie and Kathy paid cash for their house. The mayor has already revealed that Eddie and Kathy purchased the land that the church is built on, and subsequently donated the land to the church. The mayor has also found out that Eddie purchased the service station from Angelo, and paid cash for that too. The mayor has concluded that Eddie and Kathy's lifestyle is more than a few notches above a typical mechanic's salary. The mayor has errantly concluded that Eddie is somehow involved in fixing sporting events.

The mayor informs Eddie, "you must be making a great return on your money." Baiting the mayor, Eddie replies, "I make money a few other ways as well." Getting right to the point, Mayor Jamieson asks, "would one of those ways happen to be on the track?" Eddie replies, "it could be." Kathy, not missing a beat, knows exactly what Eddie is up to, and where this conversation is going.

The mayor boldly asks, "what would it take for you to come in second place in a meet?" Knowing now that the information Officer Hayes has been searching for is at hand, Eddie replies, "you'll have to talk to my agent. I don't make those decisions. For example, everyone knows I can beat Mark in the 200-meter dash. But, sometimes Mark wins, and sometimes I win. Get it? So, you'd have to talk to my agent. He decides everything. By the way, this year, my brother will be running the 200-meter dash."

Now very interested on more than one level, Mayor Jamieson asks, "your agent? Who is that?" Eddie replies, "yeah. His name is Jackson Finley. He determines how fast I run, and who wins. As I said, I don't make those decisions. Mr. Finley is always looking for ways to expand. If you want in, you'll have to talk to him."

The mayor asks, "how do I get in touch with Mr. Finley?" Eddie explains, "he's not local. He spends most of his time down in the Carribean. He'll be up for the meet in January. There's a lot at stake in this meet." Mayor Jamieson is now 100 percent convinced that he just stumbled across the insider he is looking for. And, Kathy is 100 percent convinced that the mayor is a crook, but Officer Hayes already knew that. And, Eddie is 100 percent convinced that the mayor is involved with an existing gambling ring.

Eddie tells Mayor Jamieson, "give me your card. I'll have Mr. Finley call you." The mayor gladly hands over his card to Eddie. Eddie tells the mayor, "Mr. Finley will be in contact with you before the meet." The mayor shakes Eddie's and Kathy's hands, smiles, and tells them, "you have a very merry Christmas!" Eddie tells Mayor Jamieson, "merry Christmas." Eddie

and Kathy head to their car, as the mayor walks back inside, planning to attend the second Christmas Eve service.

On the way home, Kathy asks Eddie, “what in the world just happened back there?” Eddie replies, “he’s gambling!” Kathy exclaims, “that’s obvious! Who is Jackson Finley?” Eddie laughs, and replies, “he’s my agent, better known as Mack, Bad Dog, and Mad Dog.” Kathy screams out, “I got it! Awesome! Richard’s going to love this!” Kathy suggests, “we definitely need to tell Richard about this before we leave for the Keys!” Eddie replies, “I know. It’s still early. Maybe we should go and talk to him now.” Kathy replies, “that would be a good idea.” Eddie makes a U-turn, and heads toward Officer Hayes’ house, hoping that he is home.

Arriving at Officer Hayes’ house on Alicia Drive, Eddie tells Kathy, “it looks like he’s home.” Kathy suggests, “it’s Christmas Eve. We should knock gently. His kids are probably in bed.” Eddie replies, “that’s a good point.” Eddie and Kathy walk up to the door, wondering if it is even a good idea to bother Officer Hayes on Christmas Eve. But, it’s much better than bothering the officer on Christmas day.

Eddie knocks on the door gently. Officer Hayes opens the door, quite surprised to see Eddie and Kathy. Kathy whispers, “merry Christmas.” Richard replies, “merry Christmas. I wasn’t expecting to see you guys tonight,” and invites them in. Kathy replies, “trust me. We weren’t expecting to be here tonight either.” Richard tells Kathy, “with the look on Eddie’s face, I can tell something’s up.” Kathy replies, “oh, yeah!” Officer Hayes’ wife, Sandy, walks up and tells Eddie and Kathy, “merry Christmas.” Kathy tells Sandy, “merry Christmas. Your wreath looks so beautiful!”

After a few minutes of quiet conversation, Eddie tells Officer Hayes, “go and get your notebook. We have some really good information for you.” Officer Hayes retrieves his notebook, wondering what could possibly be so important on Christmas Eve. When he returns, Officer Hayes tells Eddie and Kathy, “let’s go into the basement. We just put the kids to bed, and I don’t want to disturb them. Santa Claus is coming tonight.” Officer Hayes, Eddie, and Kathy quietly head to the basement, as to not disturb the kids.

Richard asks, “what’s up?” Eddie explains, “we saw Mayor Jamieson at church tonight. He wanted to talk to me. So, we had an interesting conversation.” Richard jokingly asks, “did you get a confession out of him?” Eddie replies, “yes.” Richard’s eyes open wide, and tells Eddie, “you don’t look like your joking.” Kathy replies, “he’s not. He’s serious.” Richard is now very interested to hear what Eddie and Kathy have to say.

Eddie then begins to explain, “the mayor found out that I bought the land the church is built on, and that I donated it to the church. He also found out that me and Kathy paid cash for our house. And, he found out I bought the service station from Angelo. I told him I made the money in the stock market.” Richard replies, “I can certainly attest to that. The stocks have been doing really great. The kids are going to have their best Christmas ever.”

Eddie continues, “but, Mayor Jamieson didn’t quite believe me. So, I wanted to see where he was going with this. So, I told the mayor, ‘I make money a few other ways.’ So, he asked me, ‘would one of those ways be on the track?’ So, I told him, ‘it could be.’” Richard exclaims, “wow! That’s the closest thing to a confession yet out of that character.” Richard is now very interested to hear the rest of Eddie’s story.

Kathy comments, “it gets better.” Eddie replies, “yeah. It does. So, here’s the really good part, so take good notes.” Richard starts a new page, somehow knowing that what is coming is very important. Eddie explains, “so, the mayor asked me, ‘what would it take for you to come in second place in a race?’ I told him, ‘you’ll have to talk to my agent,’ and that, ‘I don’t make those decisions.’ Then, I told him that everyone knows I can beat Mark in the 200-meter dash, but sometimes Mark wins, and sometimes I win.’ So, then the mayor was getting very interested.” Officer Hayes smiles, telling Eddie, “it sounds like Christmas just came a little early for the police department.”

Eddie tells Richard, “here’s the fun part. So, I told the mayor that my agent’s name is Jackson Finley. Write that name down, because I might forget. I told him that Finley spends most of his time in the Carribean, but he’ll be up here for the meet in January. So, the mayor wants to meet with Mr. Finley, and get in on the action. So, he gave me his card, and I told him Mr. Finley would be in touch with him sometime before the divisional meet in January.” Eddie hands Richard Mayor Jamieson’s card, as Richard is frantically taking notes.

Kathy asks Eddie, “can I tell him the rest?” Eddie replies, “sure. Go ahead.” Kathy tells Richard, “okay. So, Eddie was thinking that Mack, who busted Dean Grimsby, could play the part of Jackson Finley. And, Mad Dog and Bad Dog could be introduced as Jackson Finley’s assistants, if anything goes wrong. And, the assistants would be really tough guys, like in the movies.” Richard smiles, and tells Eddie and Kathy, “that will actually work really well. I was thinking of Mack myself. He’s one of the best guys we have for this kind of work. And, he can be very convincing.”

Reviewing his notes, Richard then asks, “so, let me get this straight. Mayor Jamieson is expecting a call next week from this agent, Jackson Finley?” Eddie replies, “yes. And, the way I left it, Mr. Finley will meet with

the mayor sometime before the divisional meet in January. And, I made it clear to the mayor that Finley makes all the decisions, not me.” Richard replies, “that’s a big help. You always want to enter these meetings with a strong upper hand.” Kathy tells Richard, “the way Eddie explained it to the Mayor, there’s no doubt that Mr. Finley controls everything.” Richard replies, “that’s really good.”

Richard mentions, “I’d better get the undercover officers into a tanning salon over the next week.” Eddie asks, “why?” Richard replies, “you told the mayor that Mr. Finley spends most of his time in the Carribean. To play the part, he needs to look the part.” Eddie replies, “I never thought about that.” Richard replies, “that’s my job. We have to think of everything. We can’t afford for anything to go wrong. You only get one chance to get something like this to work. And, it’s really good that the undercover officer who played Mack is Italian. He’ll tan easily.” Kathy replies, “just like Paula.” Richard comments, “I’ve noticed that.”

Richard then taps on his notebook, and comments, “this Mayor Jamieson character must be some sort of real idiot.” Kathy asks, “how do you say that?” Richard explains, “when he was talking with you and Eddie tonight, he set his own trap, walked right into it, and set himself up for the fall. I didn’t think anyone could be that stupid.” Kathy suggests, “maybe that will make it easier to bust him.” Richard replies, “it will. Believe me, it will. What you guys set up here for us is a red carpet leading to a pot of gold.”

Officer Hayes, Eddie, and Kathy review the notes, making sure everything is accurate. During the review, Richard mentions, “I’m up for a promotion this year. Chief Hanson is retiring, so Captain Gabriel is likely going to be promoted to Chief of Police. Someone has to fill Captain Gabriel’s position.” Kathy replies, “wow! That’s a really big step up.”

Richard explains, “the typical ranks in a police department are, junior officer, patrol officer, corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and chief. In our county, there is no lieutenant. And, detectives are generally the only ones at the corporal level. I’m a sergeant, so the next step up would be captain. There are four of us on the force who are eligible for that position. I was high on the list after busting this Maurice Crum character and his drug dealing empire. Then, I moved up on the list after busting the gambling ring. If this works out, it would just about seal the deal for me. And, I have you guys to thank for that.” Kathy replies, “I’m glad we could help.”

Richard thumbs through a few pages in his notebook, and mentions, “I have some news for you guys too.” Eddie asks, “what’s that?” Finding the page he was looking for, Richard replies, “Gerhard Zunde’s home was broken into about a week ago.” Kathy silently exclaims, “oh, no! Is Dr.

Zunde okay?" Richard replies, "he's fine. And, so is Lynn Amherst, who was in the house with him during the break in."

Richard continues, explaining, "it's not as bad as you think. This character, Frank Glooma, who works for the town's water company as a meter reader, broke in. The guy drew a gun, and Gerhard threw a discus at him. The discus hit Glooma in his chest." Eddie comments, "ouch! That must have really hurt!" Richard replies, "that's exactly what the paramedics said."

Richard then explains, "this Glooma character is not doing too well. He's got seven crushed ribs, a broken breastbone, and his heart got swollen from the impact. From what I hear, his chest is now one big metal plate, and he's got a few more surgeries to go." Kathy asks, "I wonder if Discus Frankie knows Giuseppe Vio Otto." Richard adds, "Vio Otto isn't doing too good either. They say he'll probably never walk again." Kathy replies, "well, that would make it really hard for him to break into any more houses, now wouldn't it?" Kathy apparently has no sympathy for an armed man who breaks into her house using a power saw to cut through the door.

Tying it all together, Richard explains, "this Frank Glooma character and this Vio Otto both worked for the town. That seems a bit odd to me. Now, I'm wondering if there are any ties between these break ins and Mayor Jamieson." Kathy asks, "did you get either of them to talk?" Richard replies, "no. Not a cheep out of either of them. That's a dead giveaway that they're working for someone else. And, guess who that would be." Kathy replies, asking, "Mayor Jamieson?" Richard replies, "you got it. But, I have to prove it. That's going to take some work."

Kathy tells Richard, "well, we'd better let you get back to your family. Me and Eddie are going away for a week, and we're leaving the day after Christmas. So, it was either tell you this today, or on Christmas." Richard replies, "speaking of Christmas, we put the Christmas tree in the den. That will make it easier when Santa Claus comes tonight, if you catch my drift. Me and Sandy will actually be getting some sleep this go around."

Richard then tells Eddie and Kathy, "thanks again for the stock tips. The kids big present this year is a swimming pool. Right after New Year's Day, the pool company will be here, digging up the back yard. And, Santa Claus is being nice to me, too. I'm getting rid of all the grass in the back yard, and putting in hardscape. So, the pool will be ready by Spring." Eddie tells Richard, "make sure you get a heater. It will extend the swimming season two months in each direction." Richard replies, "we did. Sandy doesn't really like swimming in cold water. She prefers the Gulf of Mexico in August, when the water temperature is 94 degrees." Kathy suggests, "and, check the skimmers every day. You don't want any dead

frogs living in your skimmers.” Eddie asks Kathy, “how can a dead frog live in a skimmer?” Realizing what she said, Kathy smiles, and replies, “hey, now! It’s late.”

Richard, Eddie, and Kathy tiptoe upstairs from the basement to the den, where Sandy started putting the presents under the tree. Kathy whispers to Sandy, “merry Christmas!” Sandy whispers back to Eddie and Kathy, “you guys have a merry Christmas too!” Richard whispers to Sandy, “they just gave me the best news I’ve gotten all year. I’ll tell you about it in a minute.”

Richard, Kathy, and Eddie tiptoe up another few steps, to the main level, and quietly walk to the door. Richard points up to the bedroom level, and points out, “we put the baby gate at the top of the stairs. It squeaks when it’s opened. So, if the kids sneak down, we’ll hear them.” Kathy replies, “that’s a pretty good idea.” Eddie and Kathy head out. Richard heads downstairs to help Sandy put the presents under the tree, and to give Sandy the good news.

The day after Christmas, Eddie and Kathy pack their suitcases, and head to their backyard portal. Walking along the path outside their pool fence, Kathy tells Eddie, “this is really weird.” Eddie asks, “what’s weird?” Kathy explains, “we’re going to the Keys for a week. Then, when we come back, it will be the same time as when we left. So, it will be like having an extra week in our lives.” Eddie replies, “yeah! I can see that now. So, for that whole week when we come back, we can’t see any of our friends.” Kathy replies, “exactly. And, when we come back, Bobby B., Erika, Braden, and Wendy will all still be down there, with us. How weird is that?” Eddie suggests, “next time, we should just take a plane.” Kathy and Eddie enter the portal, and arrive in the back yard of the home they are renting. They find that Mark and Paula got there first.