

Eddie, The Collegiate Senior

Chapter Eight Graduation

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On the morning of graduation, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. are all ready to graduate and move on to the next phase in their lives. Also, graduating this semester is Hoffer, Erika and Tessa. Standing around in their caps and gowns outside the tunnel to the track, the tribe talks about what they plan on doing this Summer. The consensus seems to be more beach time and more fun. Not present at graduation today is anyone with the name of McCutchen. If anyone from the McCutchen family were present, Mark would definitely be up to some sort of mischief.

The graduates are told to line up in the order in which they were assigned during the graduation rehearsal, which, like at any university, is alphabetically. Eddie tells the group, "I guess we'll meet after the ceremony." Mark asks, "where?" Bobby B. suggests, "how about at the shot-put pad." Everyone agrees, exchanges high-fives, and finds their place in line. With a few thousand graduates, the process of finding their place in line takes quite a while.

While the graduates are lining up, the stands begin to fill with the parents and friends of the graduates. In the stands today are Kathy, Paula, and Wendy, who are sitting with the families of the graduates in their circle. Kathy mentions to Paula, "here we are again. Our home away from home." Paula replies, "yeah. I'd say. It seems like we've spent more time in this stadium over the years than in class or at home." Wendy, who was a Timekeeper for the track team while she was at the University, replies, "ain't that the truth."

Kathy mentions, "after today, I get to start my normal life." Paula laughs, and reminds Kathy, "a normal life? Your normal life is going to come to an abrupt end in September when that baby pops out. And, eighteen years later, when you have a chance at a normal life again, you'll forget what a normal life is. And, then you'll realize you've never had a

normal life.” Kathy thinks about Paula’s comment for a moment, and replies, “you might be right about that.” Paula can’t help but to reply, “of course I’m right.” Kathy relents, and tells Paula, “okay. You won this one.” Paula replies, “I always win.” Kathy replies, “except for when I win, which is most of the time.” Paula tells Kathy, “do not.” Kathy smiles, and replies, “yeah, I do.”

Kathy and Paula’s verbal ping pong match is suddenly interrupted when the band begins to play and the processional begins. Walking onto the stage, President Caldwell leads the group of high level administrators. Following President Caldwell is Provost Leighton, who hopes this day goes much better than yesterday. Kathy and Paula pay little attention to the processional, as the stage fills with two dozen people, including the class valedictorian and salutatorian. Once the dignitaries are seated, many of the guests wonder who the empty seat on the stage is for. Provost Leighton knows very well who should be sitting in that seat.

Once the administrators are seated, the graduates walk in single file, taking their seat in front of the stage. Kathy looks for Eddie, whom she cannot find in the sea of identically dressed graduates. The band continues to play, entertaining the guests until all the graduates are seated.

Once the last graduate takes their seat, the music stops for a minute. The band then plays the National Anthem, followed by the schools Alma Mater song and fight song. The invocation this year is given by Dr. Kristibueze Akinmola. Dr. Akinmola, whom the track team knows well, is the father of Adekunle Akinmola. Next week, Adekunle Akinmola will graduate from seminary. Following the invocation, President Caldwell gives his address, followed by the valedictorian’s address, which is given by Ruth Tanner, an international relations major.

The valedictorian begins her address, and Kathy whispers to Paula, “can’t they drag this on a little longer?” Paula replies, “you’d better watch what you say, girl. They just might.” Kathy, looking forward to the graduation party later today, would be happier with an abbreviated graduation ceremony. But, the administrators, who like to be seated and seen on stage, seem to prefer a ceremony that takes up the majority of the morning. Eddie, in fact, would rather have had his diploma mailed to him, but the tribe nixed that idea.

Addressing a common subject, the valedictorian’s subject matter causes Kathy to giggle. Kathy asks Paula, “did you just hear that?” Paula replies, “yeah! Here it comes, another speech on world peace. You’d think she was vying for the Miss America title or something.” Paula then starts singing *Kum By Yah*, albeit very quietly. Trying hard to compose herself, Kathy starts laughing, causing those around her to wonder what

could possibly be so funny. Kathy whispers to Paula, “stop that! People are looking at you.” Paula ignores Kathy, and keeps singing. Kathy again whispers, “stop it, girl! This is graduation.” Paula again ignores Kathy, and continues to sing *Kum By Yah*.

Calming down a bit, and mimicking the valedictorian’s tone, Kathy whispers to Paula, “after the graduation ceremony today, the peace train will stop at the West end of the stadium. If you are for world peace, please jump on the peace train and work for world peace. You owe it to yourself and to your loved ones.” Kathy then starts singing the song *Peace Train*. Paula starts laughing, and tells Kathy, “stop it, girl! Everyone’s looking at us!” Kathy smiles and replies, “hey! You started it.” Kathy continues to sing, as Paula tries to ignore her.

Seeing she found Paula’s funny bone for today, Kathy whispers to Paula, “I want whirled peas. I want whirled broccoli and whirled potatoes too.” Paula again whispers to Kathy, “stop it, girl!” Putting on a sad face, Kathy replies, “hmm. I see you’re not for whirled peas. That makes me very sad.” Paula tells Kathy, “that’s right. I’m for whirled war. That’s why I bought a blender. I put grapes, oranges, and apples into my blender, turn it on, and let them fight it out for the dominant flavor. Grapes always win.” Kathy ignores Paula for the moment, trying to think of a comeback as she listens to the remainder of the valedictorian’s speech.

The valedictorian moves on to the topic of world hunger, and how it is everyone’s responsibility to solve that problem. Paula whispers to Kathy, “yeah. She’s right. We need to solve world hunger. I’m going to quit my job, and sell flowers on a street corner from now on. Then, I can donate the money to world hunger.” In a childish tone, Kathy replies, “I want to help!” Paula tells Kathy, “good. You can grow the flowers, and I’ll sell them. And then, there will be no more world hunger.” In a serious tone, Kathy replies, “now, I’m hungry. My stomach is growling. My stomach sounds like whirled hunger. I should eat some whirled peas.” Paula laughs, telling Kathy, “stop it, girl.” Kathy reminds Paula, “hey, girl! You started the whole thing!”

As the valedictorian’s speech drags on, Paula tells Kathy, “all that baby food you’ll be buying soon is nothing more than whirled food. Whirled food can solve whirled hunger.” Kathy laughs, and informs Paula, “then, send whirled baby food to all the starving people in China. And, by the way, we’re not buying grocery store baby food. I’m going to make my own baby food with my food processor and my NutriBullet.” Paula whispers to Kathy, “as I said, whirled food.” Kathy tells Paula, “we’d better stop this whirled shit. Everyone is looking at us.” Paula tells Kathy, “whirled shit would be called diarrhea.” Kathy laughs, whispering to Paula, “stop it!” Paula asks, “why? Everyone around here is listening to us instead of the valedictorian’s speech.” Kathy replies, “that’s because

watching the grass grow in the red zone is more exciting than listening to her whirled peas speech.”

The valedictorian finally finishes her speech, which could not have come soon enough for Kathy and Paula. Next in the order of events, Provost Leighton walks up to the microphone, announcing, “good morning,” to which the faculty, staff, graduates, and guests cordially reply, “good morning.” Provost Leighton continues, “this has been a very special year for me. I have never, in all my years at this University, felt closer to the student body than I have in the last two years. Over the last few years, I have come to know some of you very well.” Provost Leighton feeling closer to the student body has nothing to do with academics, and everything to do with coaching the track team.

With an unconventional message, Provost Leighton continues, “this is an academic institution, where students traditionally learn from the faculty. I have also learned from many of you, often at a time that I was least expecting it. For many of you, after today, your formal academic experience has come to an end. Just because you are graduating today, that does not mean you stop learning. Some of you have chosen to continue your academic endeavors, seeking an advanced degree in a specialized field. And, a select few of you who are graduating today with an advanced degree are our future teachers, professors, mentors, and researchers. You too, will continue to learn after you leave here today. Today is only the beginning.”

Provost Leighton then announces, “if you have reviewed your program, you may have noticed that today’s commencement address was to be delivered by Dr. Sean Anderson. The empty seat on the stage to my left was to be Dr. Anderson’s seat. Unfortunately, Dr. Anderson could not be here with us today. I was informed late yesterday that he had an emergency and is unable to make it to your graduation ceremony.” The audience is very quiet, wondering what contingency plans, if any, were made.

Addressing the graduates specifically, Provost Leighton continues, “yesterday, with four hours to find an alternate keynote speaker, I believe I have found the right person to deliver your commencement address today. I do hope you are pleased with the individual I have chosen. Please give a warm welcome to Mr. George Frazier, the head coach of our University’s track team.” The graduates and guests clap and cheer, as Mr. Frazier jogs out from the tunnel and up to the stage, where he shakes hands with Provost Leighton. Many in attendance today have never heard of Mr. Frazier. Some in attendance have heard of him. Fewer have met him. Only a select few have ever heard him speak. And, even fewer people know him well.

Greeting his audience, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “good morning!” The attendees reply in unison, “good morning.” Mr. Frazier looks around at the stadium, and announces, “it seems like I can’t get away from this track. This track is my home away from home.” Some people laugh, yet others are quiet, wondering what a track coach has to say to the graduates today.

With no notes to accompany his totally unprepared speech, Mr. Frazier begins, “congratulations to all of you who are graduating today. Today, you have crossed the finish line. You have obtained a degree in the field of your choice, putting in much time and effort to attain your goal. For some of you, that degree is in exercise science. For others, your chosen field is communications, mathematics, history, or some field that you plan to work in when you graduate. Regardless of your chosen field, I will share with you today exactly what you need to know to succeed in anything you do.” Anyone on the track team now knows exactly what Mr. Frazier is about to say. They have heard those words many times before. To others, including the administration and faculty present today, what the coach has to say remains a big mystery.

Mr. Frazier, now having the attention of the graduates, explains, “first, let me begin with the basics of how you got where you are today. There are only three types of degrees offered by any college or university. Those three degrees are a degree in memorization, a degree in problem solving, or a degree in the arts. A degree in history is nothing more than a degree in memorization. A math degree is nothing more than a problem solving degree. A degree in music is a degree in the arts. Granted, many degrees are a combination of the three types that I just mentioned. The only difference between the three types of degrees are the field of study in which you memorized information, solved problems, or developed your artistic skill. That would be the name of your degree that you will see on your diploma in just a while.” No one outside the track team has ever heard the numerous types of college degrees whittled down to their least common denominator before.

Reviewing what the students have done during their time at the University, Mr. Frazier continues, “over the last few years, you sat in classrooms, took tests, performed lab experiments, solved problems, and wrote papers. When you’ve taken enough classes and passed enough tests, they give you a piece of paper, called a diploma, that tells you that you’ve taken enough classes, and passed enough tests.” Provost Leighton cannot help but to smile, knowing where Mr. Frazier is going with his address. She remembers well the day she originally heard Mr. Frazier address this topic. The other administrators, however, are quite skeptical of the appropriateness of Mr. Frazier’s subject matter. So far, Mr. Frazier’s address is unlike any other they’ve heard.

Mr. Frazier raises his voice, and exclaims to the graduates, “nothing they teach you at this University or any other university will determine whether you succeed when you graduate!” Silence comes over the stadium as a result of Mr. Frazier’s unexpected statement. The administrators sitting on the stage are quite shocked at the coach’s statement, except for Provost Leighton.

Mr. Frazier then announces, “today, I am now going to tell you how to succeed at anything you do. Whether it is in sports, in the classroom, or at your job, the one principle leading to success is the same!” The administrators seated on the stage wonder what in the world is happening. Some administrators question whether Provost Leighton, choosing Mr. Frazier as the commencement speaker, has gone off the deep end.

Getting right to his point, Mr. Frazier announces, “now, listen to me very carefully. If you forget anything else I say, please remember this. The one, and only one, attribute that will determine your success at anything you attempt in life is you must attack the challenge with no fear! Did you hear that? No fear! Absolutely no fear! You must attack the challenge you face with no fear!” The graduates clap, many of them realizing the unconventional message they are hearing is what they’ve been waiting to hear for a long time.

Waiting for the applause to subside, Mr. Frazier pauses, then tells his audience, “let me tell you a story. One weekend, when I was in my early teens, it was stormy outside, and my father was watching a track meet. Since track was my sport, I watched along with him. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. My race, the 100-yard dash, came up. I watched that race very closely. It was clear as day which runner took first place, but second and third place seemed to be a tie. While my father and I were waiting patiently to find out who came in second and who came in third place, I asked my father, ‘dad, who do you think came in second?’ My father turned to me and said, ‘George. It doesn’t matter. They both lost. Only one person wins the race. Everyone else is a loser.’ I told my father, ‘but, they give medals for second and third place.’ He replied to me, ‘so what. They still lost.’”

Thousands of people are in the stadium listening to Mr. Frazier, and it is possible to hear the proverbial pin drop. Mr. Frazier continues, “wanting to teach me a lesson, my father told me, ‘George, go and get your Bible.’” Mr. Frazier walks over to Dr. Akinmola, and asks to borrow his Bible, then continues, “I went to my room, and returned with my Bible. My father told me to open my Bible to First Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 24, and read it to him. I read, ‘Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you win.’ My father looked me straight in the eye, and told me, ‘George, there

is only one winner. Everyone else is a loser. It's that simple.' That day, I saw the deep conviction in his eyes. Mark my word! There is only one winner!" Mr. Frazier returns Dr. Akinmola's Bible to him, and walks back to the lectern.

Now having the audience's undivided attention, Mr. Frazier continues, "my father didn't stop there. He asked me, 'George, when you play football in school, and your team loses, do you go around boasting to everyone that your team came in second place? Before I could even answer, he told me, 'of course you don't! Second place is nothing to be proud of, especially if there are only two teams playing!' If there are two runners in the race, or eight, there is still only one winner! If you come in second place, congratulations! You are the first loser! They give medals for first place, second place, and third place. Where in the world did that come from? The gold medal is the only one that matters!" Mr. Frazier now has the full attention of the administrators, who normally sleep through such a presentation.

Giving a recent example, Mr. Frazier continues, telling the audience, "some of you may know Edward Bogenskaya. Eddie, please stand. Eddie holds the world record in the 100-meter dash, which is 9.93 seconds, set right here in the University's stadium." Eddie stands and waves to the crowd, receiving much applause. Kathy, who was wondering earlier where Eddie was seated, now knows exactly where he is. Eddie, who didn't even want to attend the graduation ceremony today, is wondering why his name came up.

Mr. Frazier explains, "nine years ago, when Eddie was a freshman in high school, Eddie won the silver medal in the 40-yard dash at the indoor State invitational meet. In the following three years at the indoor State invitational meet, Eddie won the gold medal in the 40-yard dash. For four consecutive years, Eddie won the gold medal in the 100-yard dash at the Spring State invitational meet. But, here's what very few people know. Eddie put all his gold medals in a box, where he couldn't see them. Left out on his dresser, where he can constantly see it, was his silver medal. That silver medal served as a constant reminder to Eddie to work harder. Second place was not acceptable to Eddie! Second place should not be acceptable to you either! In a race, there is only one winner!"

Mr. Frazier then gives an applicable example to the graduates, telling them, "now, you're probably wondering how any of what I just said applies to you. Listen up, because now I'm going to give you an example of a winner, and how she won." Ruth Tanner, the valedictorian, smiles, sincerely believing that Mr. Frazier is making reference to her. Provost Leighton also smiles, knowing that Mr. Frazier is not making reference to the valedictorian, but rather has an interesting story coming. Truth be told, Provost Leighton enjoys listening to Mr. Frazier speak. That is a

good part of the reason she invited him to give the commencement address today.

Looking around the stadium, Mr. Frazier announces, “many of you know Dr. Alexander Karakova, our University’s athletic director. His daughter, Kathy, attended this University and graduated with a master’s degree in Exercise Science last year. Kathy, please stand and wave to the audience.” Now wondering why she is being singled out, Kathy stands, prompting Paula to whisper to Kathy, “whirled peas.” Kathy smiles, trying to hide her laugh, as she waves to the crowd. Kathy then sits, and the applause slowly subsides.

Mr. Frazier explains, “for as long as Kathy could remember, she wanted to be a gym teacher at an elementary school. Kathy set that goal for herself very early in life. When she was in high school, Kathy was highly focused on athletics. She was very instrumental in paving the way for women to participate on the men’s track team. And, trust me, there were many hurdles in her way! But, that did not stop Kathy. In her senior year in high school, Kathy broke the women’s State record in the 100-yard dash. Her efforts led to a full athletic scholarship to this University, where she ran track for four years. Kathy’s primary events were the short sprints. For four years, Kathy won the gold medal in the 40-yard dash and the 100-yard dash! And, Kathy set the divisional record in the 100-yard dash when she ran for this University, which was previously held by our own Provost Athena Leighton.” Provost Leighton held the University’s record in the 100-yard dash before Kathy broke it, and unofficially broke the divisional record at one time. Provost Leighton smiles, deeply appreciating the reference to her past accomplishments. The audience cheers to a level not heard in any other commencement address at the University.

Having no script to his speech, Mr. Frazier deviates from his topic, and tells the audience, “for those of you who don’t know, Provost Leighton is also one of our track coaches. Coach Leighton is largely responsible for leading our University’s track team to an undefeated season this year.” Mr. Frazier turns to Provost Leighton, and tells her, “Coach Leighton, please stand for the audience.” The audience cheers for the provost who, for the first time in her life, realizes that she would rather be identified as a track coach rather than the provost of the University. Provost Leighton then sits, wiping a tear of happiness from her eye.

Getting back on track, Mr. Frazier laughs and states, “now, where was I? Oh, yeah. Kathy set the goal of teaching gym in an elementary school very early in her life. Today, Kathy is doing exactly that! Kathy is working in her chosen profession, knowing that, without a doubt, she made the right choice. Kathy is now the gym teacher at the elementary school she attended when she was a child. Now, listen to me.” Mr. Frazier pauses for

a moment, then exclaims, “Kathy won! Kathy defined her own race, and won! Kathy did not run your race. She did not run my race. She ran her own race, set her goals, and attained them. Kathy did not settle for second place! Kathy has won the gold medal in what she has chosen to do in life!” The audience applauds, clearly understanding Mr. Frazier’s parallel.

With yet another real world application, Mr. Frazier asks, “now, you’re probably wondering why coming in second place is so bad.” Everyone on the track team knows exactly what is coming, but those outside the track circle have no clue what they are about to hear. Mr. Frazier explains, “some of you, when you graduate, will be in the sales field. If you are working with the customer, and get them to sign the sales contract, congratulations! You won! You came in first place! Now, let me ask you this. What does the salesman who came in second place get?” Mr. Frazier pauses, then answers his own question for his audience, exclaiming, “nothing! Absolutely nothing! In sales, there is only one winner! Second place and third place count for absolutely nothing!”

Citing yet another applicable example, Mr. Frazier explains, “let me give you another example. Some of you will soon be employed in a white collar profession. Someday, you will undoubtedly be up for promotion. If you have five coworkers, and only one person will be promoted, there will be one winner and five losers! Whoever receives the promotion will demonstrate the one trait leading to success of having no fear! The winner will demonstrate confidence! The winner is someone who will not settle for second place!” Mr. Frazier’s audience claps and cheers. The administrators, who initially had their doubts, quickly realize that the graduates relate to Mr. Frazier much better than any past commencement speaker.

Mr. Frazier then asks the graduates, “what are your goals? Why did you come to this University?” Some of the graduates, no doubt, are mentally working on answering Mr. Frazier’s simple questions. But, Mr. Frazier helps them attain the answer, stating, “for some of you, your goal is to make a lot of money. There’s nothing wrong with that. For others, it might be finding a job where you have lots of time for leisure. There’s nothing wrong with that either. Some of you want to travel, do research, or teach. Whatever your goal is, define your own race, define your own goals, and attack your challenge with no fear!” The graduates clap and cheer, with the invited guests joining in.

Mr. Frazier tells the audience, “many of you may know Axel Braden. Axel Braden is one of our campus police officers, and is graduating today with a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice. Axel, please stand up.” Braden stands up and, waving to the crowd, receives much applause. Mr. Frazier reveals, “Axel Braden was also a member of our University’s track

team. Mr. Braden broke the world record in the 400-meter dash, which now stands at 43.75 seconds.” The audience cheers, as Braden again waves to the crowd. Braden takes his seat, as one lone voice is heard from the stands, yelling out, “go Axel!” The voice is that of Wendy, who graduated last year and is engaged to Braden. The audience claps again, clearly giving the impression they are enjoying Mr. Frazier’s interactive address.

Mr. Frazier continues, “for some of you, the reason that you will not succeed is because of that thing in your head they call a brain. Someone has programmed you and has convinced you that you can’t succeed. Many athletes have heard that they can’t beat Axel Braden. If you were at any of our track meets, you heard Braden’s energy echo throughout the stadium before the race ever began. His enthusiasm sucked the energy and confidence out of his opponents before the race ever began! Braden won the race before the gun was even fired! The reason Axel Braden won is because he attacked his challenge with no fear!”

Mr. Frazier chuckles, and asks, “can any of you who know Axel Braden hear him telling everyone, ‘I’m not so sure about this race. I don’t think I can win this time. These guys look a lot faster than I am, and they’re going to kick my ass.’” Following a brief pause, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “no! Of course, you can’t! If you allow yourself to think that way, no matter what you are up against, you will never win! Your competition in the real world is nothing compared to your own mental obstacles! Do not, and I repeat, do not let yourself get in the way of achieving your goals!”

Moving on to his next topic, Mr. Frazier addresses a special group of people, telling them, “some of you may be about to enter a profession that is not congruent with your aspirations. You may have realized that, since entering this University, your goals have changed. And, some of our guest today may even be in that same predicament. There is nothing worse than running someone else’s race! If you don’t like your job or career path, find something else to do!” Quoting First Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 24 one more time, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you win.” Mr. Frazier then advises his audience, exclaiming, “you have no business running in a race that is not yours! You will not win! Run your own race! Then, you will win!”

With another illustration on the way, Mr. Frazier chuckles, and asks, “you’re probably wondering what I mean by you have no business running in a race that is not yours. Robert Bradshaw, please stand up.” Bobby B. stands up, and waves to the crowd. The crowd cheers, suggesting that many graduates are eager for Mr. Frazier to give another illustration. Mr. Frazier explains, “Robert Bradshaw’s event is the shot-put. Robert Bradshaw, with a throw of 22.20 meters earlier this year, owns the world

record in that event. The track team knows Robert Bradshaw as Bobby B. or the shot-doc. Robert Bradshaw is the best in the world at what he does.”

Mr. Frazier then raises his voice, and exclaims, “the 100-meter dash is not Bobby B’s. event! The 1,500-meter run is not Bobby B’s. event! When Coach Leighton and I assign events for a meet, we select those who will compete from the best athletes we have available for each specific event. The shot-put is Bobby B’s. event! We assign him to that event, expecting that he will win! And, he wins! Someone, please tell me why I would have him run the 100-meter dash! You can’t! What you do well is your race or your event. You have no business running in a race that is not yours! You will not win! Run your own race! Then, you will win the gold medal!”

Summarizing what he said today, Mr. Frazier instructs the graduates, “when you leave here today, the world that you enter will be very different from the University environment that you’ve been a part of for a few years. You will be starting with a clean slate. I highly suggest that, on that slate, you define your own race, and attack the challenges ahead of you with no fear!”

Borrowing from what he has heard Provost Leighton say to the team several times in the past, Mr. Frazier continues, “when you watch a professional football game, every player on the field has been told at one time or another that they’ll never make it in the NFL. The same holds true for any sport, such as basketball, baseball, track, boxing, and so on. When you listen to music on the radio, every musician was constantly told that they will never make it in that industry. Some athletes, musicians, or whatever, have deliberately chosen to ignore all the negative talk, and chase after their dreams and goals anyway. They are the ones who succeed! And, as Coach Leighton often says, ‘to not even try is to fail by default.’ You must attack your challenge with no fear!”

Mr. Frazier pauses, then announces, “thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I sincerely hope that I’ve said something that will help you in your future endeavors, whether it is in your job, in any sports you may engage in, or something as simple as landscaping your yard. Thank you again for having me today!”

Mr. Frazier receives a standing ovation from the parents and friends of the graduates. Breaking from tradition, the graduates stand, joining in on the appreciation of Mr. Frazier’s advice. The administrators seated on the stage also stand, expressing their approval. President Caldwell whispers to Provost Leighton, “in all my years at this University, I have never heard such an energetic commencement address.” Provost Leighton whispers back to President Caldwell, “I don’t think anyone will forget what they’ve heard here today.” President Caldwell replies, “I don’t think I’ll forget

either.” President Caldwell approaches the lectern and shakes Mr. Frazier’s hand. Mr. Frazier leaves the stage, and jogs to the tunnel from which he entered earlier, waving to the crowd on his way out.

Following Mr. Frazier’s commencement address, the moment the graduates have been waiting for gets underway. Walking up one by one, the graduates receive their diplomas. As in every graduation ceremony, the graduates are called up in alphabetical order. When Eddie’s turn comes, Dean James Beckman announces, “Edward Bogenskaya, Bachelor of Science.” Eddie walks up to the stage, and shakes hands with President Joseph Caldwell. Walking across the stage, Eddie stops and Provost Athena Leighton shakes Eddie’s hand and hands Eddie his diploma. Provost Leighton smiles, as Eddie receives the degree he was promised for running track at the University for four years.

The end of the ceremony brings the closing remarks. In a brief speech, President Caldwell addresses the students, encouraging them in their future endeavors. President Caldwell offers congratulations to the graduates on the part of the faculty and staff. Knowing everyone has a long day ahead of them, President Caldwell dismisses the graduates.

Immediately after the ceremony, caps fly into the air and the graduates all cheer. Parents and friends of the graduates descend down from the stands to greet the graduates. With thousands of people in the stadium, it takes quite a while for everyone to be reunited with their group. But, Eddie and the tribe had it all figured out ahead of time. They all planned to meet at the shot-put pad. Their family and friends will easily find them there.

After graduation, Kathy and Eddie rush over to their house, getting ready for the graduation party. The pool has been heated to a nice warm temperature so everyone can stay in the water for as long as they want. Arianna, from the pizzeria, is delivering the pizza, calzones, and side dishes. This year, Eddie had bottles of wine and beer delivered for those who choose to indulge. And, Kathy made a huge bowl of chocolate mousse, secretly hoping that no one eats any. Most important, before everyone arrives, Kathy makes sure there are no dead frogs or other uninvited guests in the skimmers or in the pool.

The guests arrive one by one, which, for the most part, are the members of the track team and a few other friends of the graduates. Many of the guests today are members of the track team who have not yet graduated. Once again, a line of Dune Buggies lines the driveway. By early afternoon, nearly everyone has arrived, and ready for a relaxing afternoon.

Over lunch, the main discussion is what everyone will be doing after graduation. With many of the graduates, the plans have been set in stone for a while. Eddie will continue in his profession as a mechanic. Mark is still doing construction work, and is fortunate enough to be selective in the jobs he chooses to do. Bobby B. will be working with Eddie and Mark, depending on the workload demand. Amber will be a senior at the University this year, so Mitchell has decided to go to graduate school. Braden has chosen to keep his position as a police officer at the University. Akinmola, also at the party today, will be graduating from seminary next week, and will be working alongside his father at the church.

Not so set in stone are Erika's and Hoffer's plans. Out by the pool, as they are having lunch, Mark asks Hoffer, "what's next for you?" Hoffer explains, "I'm kind of looking for a job. Since Tessa will be working around here, I'm trying to find something in the same area." Knowing that Hoffer has earned a marketing degree, Kathy suggests, "why don't you go and talk with Angela at the TV station? They might have something there." Hoffer looks at Kathy and Tessa, telling her, "I can do that. They're always hiring people in my field." Now with a plan, Hoffer has something to do next week.

Erika, who also graduated today, has been quiet regarding her plans after graduation. Tessa asks Erika, "so, Erika, what are your plans?" Graduating with a degree in Criminal Justice, Erika replies, "I got a job. I'm going to be a county police officer." Excited to hear the news, Tessa asks, "when do you start?" Erika replies, "in about a month. I wanted to take some time off before I start working so I can plan the wedding."

Hearing the news that Erika is planning her wedding, Paula suddenly exclaims, "when did this come about? When is your wedding?" Erika replies, "we haven't set a date yet, but we were thinking sometime in the Fall." Paula tells Erika, "if you're getting married in the Fall, girl, you'd better get moving! You're running out of time!" Erika asks, "really?" Paula replies, "oh, yeah!" Paula explains to Erika that, if she plans to get married in the Autumn, she has a lot of work to do, and not much time to do it.

After lunch, the pool becomes the center of attention. Most everyone gets in the pool, relaxing for a while. Today, Tessa is not swimming laps, but rather socializing. A few of the guests lay out in the sun, getting a head start on their suntan. Paula and Erika sit at a table, where Paula tries to convince Erika to hire a wedding planner. Eddie and Mark sit at another table, where they discuss moving forward with Mark and Paula's Volkswagen Bus project.

Bobby B., who vows not to lose the cannonball contest later this year at the county pool, takes a practice jump into the pool. Making a huge splash, Bobby B. gets everyone in the immediate area soaking wet. A few sunbathers yell out, "does anyone have a towel?" Eddie yells out, "I'll go inside and get a few." Mark tells Eddie, "I'll come with you." Eddie and Mark head inside to get a few towels for the wet sun bathers, who will dry out in ten minutes if they would only wait.

As they are walking up to the door, Eddie is startled, and asks Mark, "did you hear that?" Mark asks, "what?" Knowing that everyone who has a Dune Buggy is in the pool area, Eddie replies, "someone just started a Dune Buggy!" Eddie and Mark run down the driveway with world class speed, wondering what is going on. Seeing the Dune Buggy that was started, and not immediately recognizing the driver from the back, Eddie rushes toward the engine as the Dune Buggy is slowly being driven away. Running up behind the Dune Buggy and pulling the ignition wire, Eddie disables the engine, which immediately stalls.

Mark grabs the driver by the arm and neck, dragging him out of the Dune Buggy. Mark exclaims, "look at what I found!" Mark asks the would-be auto thief, "hey, junior! Do you want me to kick your ass or call the police? Your choice. Pick one." The thief exclaims, "let me go!" Seeing who it is, Eddie tells Mark, "how about you kick his ass and I'll call the police." Mark replies, "that sounds like a deal." Eddie, in no rush, waits around, not wanting to miss the ass kicking, which appears to be imminent.

The thief viciously fights Mark, throwing a few lame punches, attempting to escape. Mark delivers a solid punch to the thief's mid section, causing him to double over in pain. Mark then delivers an uppercut to the left jaw, causing the thief to fall to the ground. Eddie yells out toward the pool area, "yo, Braden! Come here!"

Within a few seconds, Braden arrives with Hoffer, with whom he was having a conversation with. Seeing who is laying on the ground, Braden laughs, and exclaims, "junior! Didn't I arrest your ass enough? You came back for more? What's the matter with you?" Eddie tells Mark, "get him off my driveway. He's getting blood all over it." Mark lifts Todd McCutchen by one arm and, dragging him over to the woods, throws him to the ground. Mark tells McCutchen, "first, my wedding, and now our graduation party." Hoffer comments, "yeah, seriously. McCutchen is a real piece of shit."

Hoffer asks, "what did I miss?" Eddie explains, "McCutchen hot-wired Tessa's Dune Buggy, and was about to drive off with it. We caught him." Checking the anti-theft device that was installed in all the Dune Buggies, Eddie comments, "the fuel valve was shut off. He wouldn't have gotten

very far anyway.” Hearing the news of what happened, Hoffer runs back to get Tessa.

Out of his jurisdiction, Braden informs McCutchen, who is still laying on the ground, “Todd McCutchen, I am making a citizen’s arrest. You are under arrest for attempted auto theft. I am going to call the police. Until the police arrive, you are hereby detained, and I ask for your cooperation. If you fail to cooperate and comply, force will be used to detain you.” Braden, a police officer, is out of his jurisdiction and made a proper citizens arrest. Braden then excuses himself, and heads inside to call the police.

McCutchen, knowing that he is in deep shit, has been carefully watching what is transpiring, looking for an opportunity to escape. Seeing the opening he has been waiting for, McCutchen quickly stands up, and makes a run for it. Eddie chases him down. Coming up behind McCutchen, Eddie shoves him off to the side, strategically aiming for a large oak tree. McCutchen slams into the oak tree, and falls to the ground. Eddie lifts McCutchen off the ground, dragging him back over to the woods.

Braden returns, announcing, “the police are on their way. They’ll be here in about ten minutes.” Mark comments, “good. That gives us enough time for everyone to try McCutchen out as a hammer.” Walking up with Hoffer, hearing the conversation, Tessa yells out, “I want the first throw!”

The voice of someone briskly walking up the driveway yells out, “you’ll do nothing of the sort!” Mark comments under his breath, “not another McCutchen.” Eddie whispers to Mark, “it looks like another hammer to me.” Arriving at the scene is Scott McCutchen, Sr., who attempts to bully his way through Eddie and his friends and get to his son. Braden allows Mr. McCutchen to pass through, telling him, “this is a crime scene. Todd McCutchen is under arrest. We don’t want any evidence disturbed. So, McCutchen ain’t going nowhere.” Mr. McCutchen attends to his son, mumbling obscenities as he evaluates the situation.

Mr. McCutchen helps Todd off the ground, and demands, “get out of my way. I need to get him out of here.” Braden informs Mr. McCutchen, “McCutchen ain’t going nowhere. He’s under arrest.” Mr. McCutchen weakly shoves Braden aside, trying to get through the crowd that has now formed. Eddie detains Todd McCutchen, as Mr. McCutchen struggles with Braden. Looking Mr. McCutchen straight in the eye, Braden exclaims, “I told you, junior! Todd McCutchen is under arrest! And, your fat ass is walking a fine line. So, I suggest you calm down before I arrest your ass too!” Due to Mr. McCutchen’s violent verbal and physical outbursts, Braden has no choice but to restrain Mr. McCutchen.

A police car rolls up in front of Eddie's house, blocking the driveway. Walking up the driveway, and seeing Todd McCutchen and his father, Officer Hayes immediately suspects what the problem is. Eddie is quite happy to see that officer Richard Hayes is on patrol today, for there will be less explaining to do. Mr. McCutchen, however, is not. Seeing Officer Hayes, Mr. McCutchen mumbles, "shit. Not him," under his breath.

Walking up to Eddie, Officer Hayes asks, "okay, what do we got here?" Eddie explains, "McCutchen hot-wired Tessa's Dune Buggy, and tried to drive off with it. I pulled the ignition wire, and Mark pulled him out of the vehicle. He tried to fight with Mark, but Mark won." Braden informs Officer Hayes, "I made a citizen's arrest for attempted auto theft, and informed him he is being detained." Officer Hayes replies, "good. Let's take a look at the Dune Buggy."

Officer Hayes can clearly see the Dune Buggy has been driven fifty feet from where it was parked. Eddie shows Officer Hayes the wire he pulled from the ignition system. Examining the Dune Buggy, Eddie and Officer Hayes see the vehicle has been hot wired. Officer Hayes mentions to Eddie, "I wonder how far he thinks he was going to get with this. Everyone on the force has seen these Dune Buggies. We know exactly who drives them." Eddie replies, "he wouldn't have gotten very far." Showing Officer Hayes the fuel cut off valve, Eddie explains, "she had the fuel line cut off. He would have made it down the street, then it would have stalled." As Eddie speaks with Officer Hayes, the rest of the group begins to trickle out to the driveway to see what's going on.

Walking back to the group, Officer Hayes tells McCutchen, "okay. Let's take it from the top. First, what are you doing here?" McCutchen replies, babbling and stuttering, "I thought, I thought I was invited to the party." Everyone around starts laughing, knowing that McCutchen has a snowball's chance in Hell of being invited to Eddie's graduation party. Officer Hayes, familiar with past run ins between McCutchen and this group, doesn't believe Todd McCutchen for a split second. Once everyone quiets down, Braden tells McCutchen, "junior! Every time we see you, someone has to kick your ass or arrest your ass! Ain't no one invited you to Eddie's party!" Erika adds, "he invited himself. That's usually called crashing a party." Mark comments, "I wonder when we saw him do that before."

Officer Hayes asks McCutchen, "do you want to try this again?" Mr. McCutchen steps in, and explains, "as Todd said, he thought he was invited to the graduation party." Braden exclaims, "ain't nobody ever gonna believe that shit! Let's just look at his rap sheet. First, his ass crashes Mark and Paula's wedding. Then, McCutchen planted steroids in Eddie's locker. When that didn't work, he planted steroids in Mark's locker. Then, McCutchen plants pot in our Dune Buggies at the county

pool!” Pointing at McCutchen, Braden exclaims, “and, I had to arrest your flimsy ass twice at the University for breaking and entering! And, Officer Morrison had to arrest your ass for trespassing! And now you’re out on bail for gambling charges! Ain’t no one invited you to this party, junior! And, now your sorry little ass is getting arrested again!”

Officer Hayes turns to Mr. McCutchen, and asks, “and, what brings you here today? Go ahead. I’m listening.” With no other choice, supporting his son’s lie, Mr. McCutchen replies, “I drove Todd to the party. As he said, he thought he was invited.” Tessa chimes in, yelling at Mr. McCutchen, “yeah, right. You drove him here so you guys can steal my Dune Buggy!” Eddie adds, “exactly! They need money to pay for all their legal fees.” Officer Hayes immediately suspects that Eddie might be on to something. McCutchen exclaims, “I wasn’t stealing anyone’s Dune Buggy!” Mark interjects, “yeah, right, junior. The next thing you’re going to tell us is that you were just taking it out on a test drive.”

Realizing there is no easy way out of this, Mr. McCutchen asks Officer Hayes, “can we please step aside for a moment?” Officer Hayes sternly informs Mr. McCutchen, “let’s get something straight. I am conducting this investigation, not you. Now, please explain to me why both of you are here today.” Mr. McCutchen replies, “I explained it to you. I drove Todd to the party.” Braden comments, “ain’t nobody gonna believe that shit.” Angry with Braden’s remark, Mr. McCutchen exclaims, “and, just who asked you?” Officer Hayes whispers to Braden, “these characters have been out on bail for three days, and they’re back on the streets. I’m taking them downtown.”

Knowing that he isn’t going to get anywhere at the moment, Officer Hayes interrupts Mr. McCutchen, announcing, “that’s enough. We’re going to sort this out downtown.” Officer Hayes arrests Todd McCutchen, and reads him his rights. Mr. McCutchen is repeatedly yelling, “you guys are not going to get away with this!” Unfortunately, there is no specific crime to charge Mr. McCutchen with at the moment, so he is let go. Officer Hayes transports Todd McCutchen to the precinct office, where he will be charged and questioned. Mr. McCutchen follows Officer Hayes to the precinct office, trying to figure a way out of this predicament.

Now that Todd McCutchen and his father are gone, Eddie and Tessa look over her Dune Buggy, making sure nothing has been damaged. The rest of the group gets back to the party. Eddie removes the jumper wires left by McCutchen, and reattaches the ignition wire he disconnected earlier. Tessa starts her engine, and everything seems to work fine. Eddie and Tessa then join the rest of the group out by the pool.

Back at the pool, the topic of conversation eventually moves away from Todd McCutchen and back to graduation. Kathy mentions, “Mr.

Frazier's speech was much better than the one at our graduation." Paula comments, "you mean the one we slept through?" Kathy replies, "yeah. That's the one." Paula mentions, "I don't even remember what the guy said during our graduation." Kathy smiles, and reminds Paula, "that's because you slept through it."

Paula comments, "oh, and that valedictorian's speech today was a real piece of work." Reaching for another slice of pizza, Kathy replies, "yeah, seriously." Joining in on the conversation, Erika comments, "that girl is going nowhere. She lives in her own little world of bunny rabbits and tulip fields." Kathy laughs, and replies, "yeah, I know. Poor little girl." Tessa asks, "I wonder what she's going to be doing now that she graduated." Paula replies, "she's going to move to wherever the starving people are this year, and sing *Kum By Yah*."

Kathy asks, "where are all the starving people this year? I mean like, when I was a kid, all we heard about were all the starving people in China. Then, the starving people were all over Africa. After that, they moved to Ethiopia." Erika points out, "Ethiopia is in Africa." Kathy replies, "oh, yeah. I knew it was on the other side of the world somewhere." Paula mentions, "all the starving people moved to Bangladesh." Kathy exclaims, "I got it! If we send whirled peas to Bangladesh, we can solve two problems at once." Paula laughs, and tells everyone around, "this is never going to end. I can tell." Erika asks, "what? Did I miss something?" Kathy replies, "yeah, you did," and explains to those around about her and Paula's conversation during the valedictorian's address earlier today.

The party goes on until early evening afternoon, when the second phase of the party begins. Hanging around into the evening is a few of Eddie's closest friends. Eddie and Bobby B. discuss getting into the Volkswagen Bus modification business, at least for the short term. Also, on the list is to finish the gym behind Eddie's Service Station. No longer having access to the University's gym, finishing the gym is now a very high priority project.

A while later, the group gathers in the corner of the pool, where Kathy and Paula discuss with Erika about planning her wedding. Erika had no idea how much work there is to do. Johnson and Barbara, and Braden and Wendy, who are also getting married soon, listen in on Kathy's and Paula's advice. Erika is now convinced that hiring a wedding planner is the best thing to do.

Later in the evening, once everyone has left, Kathy asks Eddie, "now, we'll have our normal life. Right?" Eddie replies, "as normal as it gets." Eddie and Kathy sit by the pool, relaxing for the remainder of the evening. The sun set a while ago, and Katarina's star faithfully appeared in the sky where it always has. Kathy touches her lips to Eddie's, and kisses him

passionately. For the rest of the evening, Eddie and Kathy catch up on the billions of kisses she promised him many years ago.