

TRACK AND FIELD

A full length play

By Tracy Wells

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CHARACTERS

5-26+

OFFICIAL

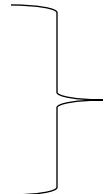
On or offstage voice who starts the races

On Your Mark.../Get Set.../Go!

SMITH

JAMES

YOUNG



Runners thinking about their futures

Dash

WILLIAMS

Superstitious

MILLER

Just wants to be helpful

High Jump

DAVIS

Afraid to leave high school

ANDERSON

Can't wait to get out of high school

Shot Put

MOORE

Social media wanna-be influencer

TAYLOR

Socially influenced friend

HARRIS

Annoyed friend

Relay

MARTIN

Rumor starter

JACKSON

Rumor spreader

BROWN

Distracted

WILSON

Hurt/confused

Discus

LEWIS	Focused discus thrower
CLARK	Friend who has much to discuss

Steeplechase

MILLER	Forced to run track for the extracurriculars
WALKER	Star athlete who can do anything

Hurdles

MATTHEWS	Has a lot on their plate
SCOTT	Carefree friend

Pole Vault

THOMAS	Working up the courage to get a prom date
NELSON	Their competitor...in more ways than one
GREEN	Their potential date

Long Distance

BAKER	Attending local college in the fall
CAMPBELL	Going away for college

AUTHOR'S NOTE ON CASTING

This play was written to be very flexible in terms of casting. The characters in this play are referred to by their last names only, as athletes often are. These names were chosen to be fairly generic and representational of many communities for ease of casting. However, if these names do not suit your community or culture, feel free to change the names to better represent your performing group and audience. You can keep them as last names or may choose first names. All characters can be any gender. In each scene, pronouns have been selected as placeholders. Feel free to change this to reflect your casting as well as any other words that need correction for it to make sense. Additionally, all characters can be doubled or tripled, so that you can have a

cast as small as 5 or as large as 25, as track and field athletes often run multiple events. You can also add non-speaking athletes into any of the scenes and can even reassign a line or two to ensemble members, so long as it does not interfere with the integrity of the scene. Note also that the characters in these scenes need not always be on the same high school team. They can be mixed and matched to be on two competing teams, or they can even be from several teams, as track meets are often set up this way. However, they can also be from the same team, even the characters noted as “competitor” as track and field is both a team and an individual sport, where teammates are literally competing against one another. Additionally, high school track teams are usually made up of a combination of males and females, with some even running at the same time during the events, so your cast can be all male, all female, or a combination of any gender.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE:

- Scene 1: On Your Mark...
- Scene 2: Dash
- Scene 3: High Jump
- Scene 4: Shot Put
- Scene 5: Relay
- Scene 6: Discus

ACT TWO:

- Scene 1: Get Set...
- Scene 2: Steeplechase
- Scene 3: Hurdles
- Scene 4: Pole Vault
- Scene 5: Long Distance
- Scene 6: Go!

SETTING

A high school track.

TIME

Modern day.

RUNTIME

Approximately 75 minutes. Can be shortened to any length by the removal of scenes.

SET/PROPS

This play can be performed with a bare set and a few props or you can have a backdrop of a high school track with painted lanes on the floor. It's up to you!

COSTUMES

All characters should wear track uniforms or similar. Matching colored tank tops and shorts will work. School names/initials can be added as can numbers or even pinned on number bibs. Not everyone has to be on the same team. They can be teammates or competitors or friends from competing schools. All should wear running shoes. Perhaps long haired actors should have their hair tied back in a ponytail or braid.

PROPS

The following field equipment items (or items that resemble them) are required: hurdles and field equipment, including a baton, discus, shot put ball and pole vault pole. Additionally, you can use starting blocks for On Your Mark, Get Set and Go, or you don't have to.

For Perusal Only

ACT ONE
Scene One: On Your Mark...

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. An OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.

OFFICIAL

Last call for the 1600 meter run. That's last call for the 1600. All competitors to the starting line.

(SMITH, JAMES and YOUNG enter, perhaps not all at once. They stretch, look around, size one another up, etc. When they are ready, they line up, staggered. Perhaps one or more of them do a few practice starts, run out a few steps then stop and turn back. Maybe they hop a little, bringing their knees up high, loosening up. If OFFICIAL is present, perhaps he raises the starting pistol. Otherwise, we hear—)

On your marks!

(SMITH, JAMES and YOUNG, crouch down, in their starting positions, heads down. A moment later, SMITH'S head shoots up, then turns to audience.)

SMITH

It's a waiting game...these last few weeks of school. Knowing the end is near. Knowing our time is coming. Knowing there's so much more out there. Wondering. Anticipating. Always at the ready.

(looks down)

On our marks.

(stands and turns to audience)

So freshman year there's this kid in my fifth period coding class. Real brainiac. Always taking notes, paying attention. Never forgets to turn in his homework. Wrecks the curve.

(mad)

Every. Single. Time!

(regaining composure)

A real parents' dream. Know what I mean? And this kid's a senior, so he stands out even more, 'cause he can actually grow facial hair and looks like he could be somebody's uncle. He's only in our coding class 'cause he already took every AP class offered and got a waiver for gym and he needed something to fill his schedule. Anyway, so everyone figures this kid is going to be a real bigshot after graduation...go to some fancy school, probably in New England or whatever... lots of big trees, super old brick buildings...students wearing letterman sweaters with elbow patches saying,

(in terrible affected accent)

“cheerio, old chap” and trading stock tips while sipping on earl gray tea. You know the place. And then after college this kid, this brainiac, he's definitely getting some sort of high paying job with a big, fancy office, and a bunch of groveling assistants who bring him his daily grande oat milk latte double shot with 2 pumps caramel and light whip. Obviously.

SMITH (Cont.)

(leans in)

But here's the thing. I stopped for gas the other day on my way home, and while I usually just pay outside with my card I had a real craving for one of those chicken taquitos...you know—the ones on the rollers that have been spinning around all day?

(wipes mouth)

I'm practically drooling just thinking about it. So I go inside, get my taquito, and pay for my gas when who do I see sitting behind the counter? Why, it's Uncle Mustache Brainiac himself! Not wearing a letterman sweater and sipping on an oat milk latte, but instead selling cartons of cigarettes and lotto scratchers while playing Minecraft on his phone. What?! How did this happen? I grab my taquito and bring it to the counter, hoping he swipes my debit card without looking up from his battle with the Ender Dragon so I can get out of there without some awkward conversation about his wasted potential. And I was almost home free...had made it two steps from the door and was reaching for the handle when I suddenly heard, "Hey Smith." I turned back. He put down his phone, looked me right in the eye and said: "Sometimes you succeed...and other times you learn."

(thinks, nods, then walks back to starting line)

Our future is coming, whether we're ready or not.

(crouches down, as before)

On your marks.

(Lights change; end of scene)

ACT ONE
Scene Two: Dash

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. WILLIAMS is center, seated with legs extended, stretching. A duffle bag is nearby..

WILLIAMS

(counting)

One, two, three, four, five, six.

(switches legs)

One, two, three, four, five, six.

(WILLIAMS switches legs and does another type of stretch as UNDERWOOD enters and crosses over.)

One, two, three, four, five—

UNDERWOOD

Hey, Williams!

WILLIAMS

Underwood, what's up?

(switching legs)

One, two, three, four, five, six.

(stands and stretches torso and arms during next few lines)

UNDERWOOD

Oh...you know...not much. Just waiting for my event to start.

WILLIAMS

What're you running?

UNDERWOOD

I'm not running this week.

WILLIAMS

Why not? I thought you said you were waiting for your event.

UNDERWOOD

Oh, I'm competing. I'm just not running.

WILLIAMS

What're you doin' then?

UNDERWOOD

I'm gonna try the pole vault.

WILLIAMS

(shocked, stops)

The pole vault? Are you crazy? How?

(starts doing high knees)

UNDERWOOD

Well, I'm pretty sure they give you that long pole thing-y and you just run a little and then launch yourself over the other pole.

WILLIAMS

You mean bar.

UNDERWOOD

No. I'm pretty sure it's called pole vaulting, not bar vaulting.

(thinks)

Or maybe it's called bar hopping? I'm pretty sure that's a thing*

(*Feel free to remove this part of the line.)

WILLIAMS

The pole is the thing you hold and the bar is what you jump over.

UNDERWOOD

I'm sure I'll figure it out.

WILLIAMS

Pole vaulting isn't something you figure out. You learn form and technique. You practice a bunch. It requires focus and skill and determination.

UNDERWOOD

(dismissively)

It's fine.

WILLIAMS

Dude! It's not fine. You're gonna get hurt!

UNDERWOOD

I won't get hurt. I never get hurt! That's why they call me Underwood the Untouchable!

WILLIAMS

(scoffs, finding it funny)

That is *so* not why they call you that. I'm pretty sure it has something to do with the smell coming out of your gym locker.

UNDERWOOD

Whatever. I'll be fine.

WILLIAMS

If you say so.

(kicking heels backward or doing another warmup)

UNDERWOOD

What are you doing?

WILLIAMS

My warmup.

UNDERWOOD

Oh, right. You run the 100 meter dash, right?

WILLIAMS

Yep.

UNDERWOOD

Isn't that one of the fast ones?

WILLIAMS

I mean, it's a track meet, so we're all meant to be fast. But yeah, it's the quickest of the sprints.

UNDERWOOD

That's coming up soon, isn't it?

WILLIAMS

Is it?

UNDERWOOD

Yeah. I think I saw some of the sprinters heading over to the starting line.

WILLIAMS

Wait, what? Are you serious?

(turns toward starting line)

They've already started to line up and I haven't even started my rituals!

(drops down and starts rifling through the duffle bag)

UNDERWOOD

Isn't that what you were just doing? Your rituals? All that jumpin' around and kickin' your own butt and all that?

WILLIAMS

No that was my warmup. My warm up isn't my rituals. My rituals are my rituals.

(WILLIAMS starts laying out various objects, including a sleeping mask, 2 large sub sandwiches, running shoes and a pair of socks.)

UNDERWOOD

What's all that?

WILLIAMS

What does it look like?

UNDERWOOD

Looks like stuff you found under your bed when your mom made you clean your room.

WILLIAMS

They're for my pre-race rituals! Normally I start them an hour before my race but I must've lost track of time! Now I'll never get them done.

UNDERWOOD

What happens if you don't get them in time?

WILLIAMS

Then I'll lose for sure!

UNDERWOOD

So every time you do your rituals you win?

WILLIAMS

Well...no. Not yet, anyway. But I've been close.

(picks up sandwich and socks)

And I had a really good feeling about today!

(WILLIAMS takes a bite of his sandwich while hopping on one foot to remove his shoe, practically falling down in the process. UNDERWOOD stops him from falling.)

UNDERWOOD

Whoa! Watch it. You're going to fall. Or choke. Or fall *and* choke!

WILLIAMS

I usually have a certain order I do them in, but there's no time. I'm going to have to double up.
(to himself)

I'll take three bites of my pepperoni and mayo sandwich, while I'm putting on my lucky socks.
(thinks, then grabs blindfold)

While blindfolded...and saying my chant!

UNDERWOOD

Eating and chanting at the same time? Gross. No one wants that. Why don't you let me help you?

WILLIAMS

Help me? How?

UNDERWOOD

You can do some of your rituals and I can do some of them for you. That way you'll get them all done before the race starts.

WILLIAMS

That'll never work.

(hopefully)

Will it?

UNDERWOOD

We won't know unless we try.

WILLIAMS

Alright. Let's do it.

(WILLIAMS holds out one sandwich to UNDERWOOD.)

WILLIAMS (Cont.)

Here. Take a sandwich.

UNDERWOOD

Um, no. I don't do mayo. And definitely not with pepperoni.

WILLIAMS

C'mon! Time's wasting and I can't eat them both.

UNDERWOOD

(sighs and takes sandwich)

Fine, but you do realize this is a revolting sandwich, right?

WILLIAMS

Oh, yeah, for sure. It's disgusting. I recommend eating it quickly. Those sandwiches have been sitting out in the hot sun for hours.

UNDERWOOD

Right.

(UNDERWOOD starts to slowly bring it to his mouth when we hear an OFFICIAL'S VOICE suddenly over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

First call for the 100 meter dash. That's first call for the 100 meter dash.

WILLIAMS

We're running out of time!

UNDERWOOD

(puts down the sandwich)

On second thought—and only for the sake of time—why don't we call this particular ritual done and move on? Whatever juju magic is in your rituals has probably been satisfied with that bite you took.

WILLIAMS

I guess so.

UNDERWOOD

(grabs sandwich from WILLIAMS and throws it on the ground)

What's next?

WILLIAMS

I still need to put on my lucky socks. And tie my shoelaces in a special pattern.

UNDERWOOD

Well I can't help with either of those. What else you got?

WILLIAMS

(putting on socks)

There's the blindfold dance.

UNDERWOOD

(reluctantly)

What's the blindfold dance?

WILLIAMS

(holds out the sleeping mask)

You're gonna put on this blindfold and do the chicken dance.

UNDERWOOD

The chicken dance? Are you serious?

WILLIAMS

Dead serious.

UNDERWOOD

I can't do the chicken dance right now.

(looks around)

Do you know how many people are in the stands watching?

WILLIAMS

(looks around, counting)

There's like, ten people here. This is a track meet, Underwood, not a football game.

(resumes tying shoes in an intricate way)

I thought you were going to help me.

UNDERWOOD

I am!

WILLIAMS

Then dance, chicken, dance!

UNDERWOOD

(sighs)

Fine.

(puts on the sleeping mask, then starts humming a melody, making wings and waving them, wiggling his backside, etc.)

Duh duh duh duh duh duh...Duh duh duh duh duh duh.... Duh duh duh duh duh duh duh

(WILLIAMS and UNDERWOOD start clapping to the melody.)

WILLIAMS
(in time to the clapping)

You're—such—a—dork.

UNDERWOOD
(stops)

That wasn't one of your rituals, was it?

WILLIAMS

Nope. But it sure was entertaining.

UNDERWOOD
(taking off the blindfold)

What's the blindfold for, then?

WILLIAMS

Oh, that's not a blindfold. That's my sister's sleeping mask. It must've gotten thrown in my bag with my socks.

(takes blindfold and puts it back in the bag then stands as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Second call for the 100 meter dash. That's second call for the 100 meter dash.

UNDERWOOD

You'd better go.

WILLIAMS

I can't! I'm not done with my rituals!

UNDERWOOD

How many more do you have to do?

WILLIAMS

Just one. But it's the hardest one of all.

UNDERWOOD

What is it?

WILLIAMS

It requires focus and skill and determination.

UNDERWOOD

Hey, just like the pole vault! I'm ready I swear.

WILLIAMS

Alright, then stand on one foot, like this.

(They each stand on one foot.)

UNDERWOOD

(a little wobbly)

Okay.

WILLIAMS

And bring your hands together like this.

(They bring their hands together with elbows out, like they are praying.)

UNDERWOOD

(even more wobbly)

Alright.

WILLIAMS

Now close your eyes and repeat after me.

(they close their eyes)

I will soar like an eagle.

UNDERWOOD

I will soar like an eagle.

WILLIAMS

I will run like a cheetah.

UNDERWOOD

I will run like a cheetah.

WILLIAMS

And I will clean out my gym locker before someone passes out from the horrendous smell.

(stops, opens his eyes and grins)

UNDERWOOD

And I will clean out my—

(stops and opens his eyes)

Wait a minute!

WILLIAMS

Sorry, I had to!

(does one final stretch)

Time to go win a race. Thanks for your help, Underwood the Untouchable.

(WILLIAMS jogs past UNDERWOOD, poking him in the belly as he goes by. UNDERWOOD falls down, then rubs his ankle.)

UNDERWOOD

Ow!

(UNDERWOOD rubs his ankle as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the 100 meter dash. That's final call for the 100 meter dash. All competitors to the starting line.

(Lights fade.)

ACT ONE

Scene Three: High Jump

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. Perhaps a large, thick mat is center, or a stack of mats. DAVIS and ANDERSON are near the mats, practicing.

DAVIS

So it's just up and over?

ANDERSON

Right.

DAVIS

Any other tips? You make it look so easy.

ANDERSON

The most important thing is to focus on the run up and the takeoff. Most high jumpers spend their time worrying about getting over the bar, but if you have you a good run up and takeoff then the bar will take care of itself.

DAVIS

Okay. Like this?

(DAVIS jogs a little then simulates a jump with a bend. If you have mats, she could land on the mats, or just stop after simulating the takeoff.)

ANDERSON

That was better, but your rhythm could use a little improvement.

DAVIS

(doubtful)

My rhythm? This isn't a drumline, Anderson. It's the high jump.

ANDERSON

You think drummers are the only ones who have rhythm? Did you see me at the homecoming dance?

(scoffs)

Please. Drummers, who?

DAVIS

(chuckles)

Okay, we get it. You know how to move.

ANDERSON

And that's not just on the dance floor. You need to develop a rhythm to your approach. Watch me, and you'll see what I mean.

(ANDERSON jogs toward the mat with a very specific rhythm. Perhaps she also bends and completes the jump.)

DAVIS

Wow. Yeah. Maybe it isn't as easy as it looks.

ANDERSON

It never is, right?

DAVIS

(sighs)

You can say that again.

(sits down, perhaps on the mat, discouraged)

ANDERSON

Davis, it's alright. There's no need to get down about it. It's just the high jump.

DAVIS

No it's not. It's everything. It's life. It's the future crashing down on us!

ANDERSON

Whoa. Okay, let's take it down a couple of notches. The future crashing down on us? Girl (or Dude) that's dark.

DAVIS

You know what's waiting out there for us, don't you?

ANDERSON

Sure...a few slices of pizza and a coke with the team. Maybe some breadsticks if Coach is feeling particularly generous today.

DAVIS

Not after the meet....after high school! It's not going to be the same. Things are going to get real.

(intensely)

Like...*really* real.

ANDERSON

Okay. So this is what we're doing now.

(maybe sits next to DAVIS, all in)

Tell me, Davis...exactly how real is life after high school going to get?

DAVIS

Oh, I'll tell you!

(stands and paces, indicating the school grounds)

In a couple of weeks they're going to kick us to the curb whether we like it or not. And there's not going to be a snack waiting on the counter when we get home.

(chuckles ruefully)

Oh, no. No more ants on a log for us. No more apple slices with that little cup of caramel dip and some sprinkles on the side because mom knows how much I like it. And sprinkles! Sprinkles are for kids, so forget ever seeing those delightful bits of sugary deliciousness on your desserts ever again.

ANDERSON

(monotone)

No. Not the sprinkles.

DAVIS

And cartoons?

(scoffs)

Once you become an adult, you can't watch cartoons anymore. Cartoons are for kids.

ANDERSON

Tell that to my older brother. He's twenty-three and does nothing *but* watch cartoons all day! He says it's okay because they're anime, and supposedly that makes them fancy or elevated or something. But he's not fooling anyone. What a joke.

DAVIS

You know what's not a joke? College.

ANDERSON

Honestly, college sounds like a blast. I can't wait to go to college. Having my own dorm room—

DAVIS

Which is the size of a closet and you have to share it with a total stranger.

ANDERSON

And I get to decide what I want to eat for every meal—

DAVIS

From a couple of pre-selected choices that have been sitting out for hours under heat lamps until they are no longer recognizable.

ANDERSON

And I can sleep in and take classes at ten a.m. if I want to—

DAVIS

Except for that one class you need in order to take that other class and it's only offered at seven a.m. all the way across campus.

ANDERSON

Alright, fine. So not everything about college is great. But it will prepare me for my future career, which is exciting.

DAVIS

That's right! Being an adult also means working. Like eight to ten hours a day! And maybe we have to wear a suit coat and uncomfortable shoes or a uniform and we only get a thirty minute lunch break and we have to eat in the employee break room and our coworker Gladys is heating up her leftovers from last night and it's...

(takes a deep breath)

Fish.

ANDERSON

(overly dramatic)

No, Gladys, no! Not fish...never fish!

DAVIS

Gladys should go to jail for that.

ANDERSON

Agreed. But you know, work isn't so bad. At least you're making money.

DAVIS

Sure, but it's not just extra spending money for the movies or a snack or a cool pair of jeans.

(leans in)

We're going to have to work to pay *bills*.

ANDERSON

(shudders)

Ew. I don't like the sound of that.

DAVIS

You shouldn't! Who wants to spend their hard earned money on gas and electric and groceries and water?

ANDERSON

Um, I'm pretty sure water is free.

DAVIS

Think again, Anderson.

ANDERSON

Are you saying...my parents pay for water? Like the water that comes out of the faucet?

DAVIS

Water ain't free.

ANDERSON

Whoa. You're blowing my mind right now, Davis.

DAVIS

Want to hear something even worse?

ANDERSON

I don't know. Do I?

DAVIS

You have to pay to have your garbage picked up.

ANDERSON

What?!

DAVIS

Yep.

ANDERSON

So you're telling me that when you grow up you have to pay for garbage?

DAVIS

Yes.

ANDERSON

This is not cool. Not cool at all.

DAVIS

And it's not just the bills.

ANDERSON

What could be worse than bills?

DAVIS

I don't know...how about dirty diapers?

ANDERSON

Oh, yeah. I forgot about those.

DAVIS

And apparently once we start having babies we can kiss sleep goodbye.

ANDERSON

This adulting business does not sound like fun.

DAVIS

What about mortgages? And endless piles of laundry? And yardwork? And errands?

ANDERSON

Stop it! I can't take it anymore!

DAVIS

And don't forget the draft!

ANDERSON

Is that really a thing anymore? The draft?

(thinks)

I don't think that's a thing.

DAVIS

I don't know. It might be. Either way, this is our future, Anderson. *This* is what we have to look forward to after high school.

ANDERSON

Don't forget Gladys leftover fish.

DAVIS

Yeah.

(They sit in silence for a moment, thinking.)

I'm scared.

ANDERSON

I know. I am too.

DAVIS

I like it here...in high school.

ANDERSON

I do too.

DAVIS

Everything is so much easier, you know?

ANDERSON

Sometimes. For some people, anyway. Not everyone.

DAVIS

Has it been hard for you?

ANDERSON

Me? Not really. Track has helped. Being a part of something. Meeting people. Having a team.

DAVIS

Yeah.

ANDERSON

I just know some people....people I went to elementary school with. They don't have it so easy.

DAVIS

That sucks.

ANDERSON

But maybe it will be better for them...the future. Maybe for some people it's not so scary.

DAVIS

You're probably right. I guess for me, right now I know what to expect. Out there...I just....I don't know. I don't even know where to begin once all of this ends.

ANDERSON

Maybe we just focus on the run up and takeoff. The here and now. Concentrate on the things we can control and know that the bar....the future...well...it'll take care of itself.

DAVIS

Really? That's it?

ANDERSON

I don't know. I hope so.

DAVIS

You make it sound so easy

ANDERSON

Sometimes you just have to jump.

DAVIS

(thinks, maybe looks at the mats)

So it's just up and over?

ANDERSON

Right. Up and over.

(They look at one another as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the high jump. That's final call for the high jump. All competitors to the landing area.

(ANDERSON and DAVIS jog off as lights fade.)

ACT ONE

Scene Four: Shot Put

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. HARRIS is holding the shot and practicing. He has a block of chalk nearby. MOORE is holding out a phone, recording a social media video. She has a bright, glittery purse nearby. Her friend, TAYLOR, is alternating between trying to be in the video and watching with obvious admiration.

MOORE

A lot of my followers have been asking about my skincare routine on meet days. Great question, guys. As we all know, sunscreen is a must.

(MOORE indicates, off camera, for TAYLOR to grab a bottle out of her purse. TAYLOR does so, happily trying to get into the camera shot as she does. MOORE holds up bottle.)

This is my absolute must have sunscreen during track season.

HARRIS

(stops and turns)

Um, excuse me? This area is reserved for shot put, not Tik Tok.*

(*Feel free to change to any relevant social media. MOORE ignores HARRIS and squeezes out a little into her hand, then hands the bottle to TAYLOR, who displays it for the camera, reacting with big expressions, etc. HARRIS has now stopped practicing and is watching.)

MOORE

What you're going to want to do is take a dollop of the sunscreen, rub it between your fingers to even it out and then apply it to your face, patting around the eyes gently so it doesn't crease in the delicate skin under your lashes.

(leans into the camera)

Because every girl knows creased looks deceased.

(turns to TAYLOR)

Isn't that right, Taylor?

TAYLOR

(leaning in to the camera)

You know it!

(TAYLOR squirts sunscreen on her hands then smears a streak under each eye then starts mugging over the top for the camera, to the annoyance of MOORE, who shuts it off.)

MOORE

What are you doing?

TAYLOR

I'm hyping. I'm your hype man. That's what you asked me to do.

MOORE

Trust me, I did not ask you to do *that*.

TAYLOR

(hurt)

What? I thought it looked cool.

MOORE

Smearing sunscreen under your eyes and acting like a fool is the farthest thing from cool.

TAYLOR

Sorry.

(grabs tissues from the purse and wipes the sunscreen off her hands and from under her eyes)

MOORE

Why don't we give the Track Meet Makeover videos a break and work on something else?

TAYLOR

Ooh, like a dance video?

MOORE

Maybe. Or we could do one of those funny filter reveals.

TAYLOR

Nice! You always have the best ideas.

MOORE

I do, don't I?

HARRIS

You know what else would be a good idea? You could try ...oh, I don't know...maybe some warmups or stretches for your event.

MOORE

I don't know. That doesn't sound like fun.

TAYLOR

Would we have to get sweaty? I don't do sweaty.

HARRIS

This is a track meet. You're on the team, right?

MOORE

Yeah. So?

HARRIS

So I'm assuming enjoy running or field events.

MOORE

What makes you say that?

TAYLOR

Yeah. We just joined for the cute outfits.

MOORE

(holding up the hem of the shorts)

I mean, these shorts are giving me life.

HARRIS

Wow. Okay. Well, to be on the team you had to sign up for at least one event.

MOORE

Don't worry. We signed up.

HARRIS

What's your event?

TAYLOR

Who knows?

MOORE

(dismissively, scrolling through her phone)

I think it's called the nine foot dash or something.

HARRIS

That's not an event.

TAYLOR

Maybe it's the slingback.

HARRIS

And that's a shoe.

TAYLOR

Oh, right.

(thinks)

Then it's gotta be the hopscotch.

(nods, proud that she remembered)

Yeah, that's it!

HARRIS

Right.... then perhaps you should work on your *hopscotching* over there and let me finish warming up for the shot put.

TAYLOR

Oh, we're warming up for our shot too. We weren't recording.

MOORE

Yeah. We're staying put.

HARRIS

You're standing right in the middle of my landing sector.

MOORE

I don't know what a landing sector is, but congrats. The lighting over here is great.

(takes a selfie with HARRIS and shows him the pic)

See?

HARRIS
(incredulous)
We're outside!
(indicates surrounding)
Everywhere has the best light!

TAYLOR
(sees HARRIS'S chalk)
Hey, what's this?
(picks up chalk bar)

HARRIS
That's my chalk. Leave it alone. I need it to improve my grip on the shot.

MORRIS
What you need is a pop socket.
(shows him the back of her phone)
You just stick it on the back of your phone and it pops right out so you can hold your phone at any angle. That should give you a good shot.
(takes another selfie with HARRIS and shows it to him)
See?

TAYLOR
So it's kinda like hair chalk, then?
(starts running chalk through her hair)

HARRIS
No! Stop!
(grabs chalk bar and looks at it)
Great. Now it's covered in loose hairs and grease.

TAYLOR
That's not grease. That's shine.

MOORE
(looking at TAYLOR'S hair)
You know, that chalk-thingy really did a great job balancing your hair oils.

TAYLOR
Really?

MOORE
Absolutely. We should do a video about it!

TAYLOR
Great idea!

HARRIS

No! Not great idea!

(MOORE turns camera on her phone and starts making a video.)

MOORE

Hey, ya'll! I'm back with my BFF Taylor.

TAYLOR

That's me!

MOORE

And together we're bringing you another Track Meet Makeover that will blow you away.

TAYLOR

You know it!

MOORE

Today we're chatting about chalk—

(holds up chalk)

HARRIS

(walking into their video)

Which belongs to me.

(tries to get chalk from MOORE, who keeps moving it out of his reach)

MOORE

It's great for taming those tresses, especially when oil abounds.

HARRIS

You know what else it's great for? Shot put. As in the track and field event that I'm about to participate in and could really use my chalk for!

(tries to get chalk but MOORE tosses it to TAYLOR)

MOORE

Taylor, show our followers what this chalky chap can do!

TAYLOR

Happy to! Is your hair feeling weighed down?

HARRIS

No. But I'm feeling super annoyed!

TAYLOR

Is wash day still a few days away?

HARRIS

No, but the shot put event is starting any minute!

TAYLOR

Then chalk is your new best friend!

(drags the chalk through her hair)

Just hold the chalk like so and run it through any section of your hair that's a little oily.

HARRIS

No! Don't do that! Please don't do that!

MOORE

Amazing results, Taylor. I wonder what else we could use chalk for?

HARRIS

I don't know...maybe...and this is just a stab in the dark, here...but how about shot put?

MORRIS

Shot puts are boring...but how about hot pits!

HARRIS

This better not be what I think it is...

TAYLOR

Yes! If those pits are feeling a little putrid, why not chalk them up too?

(holds up an arm)

HARRIS

(falling to his knees)

Please! I'm begging you, do not put my chalk in your arm pits.

TAYLOR

Let's try it together!

(applies chalk to her armpits)

HARRIS

Noooo!

(crumples in dismay)

MOORE

Thanks, Taylor. Not only did our hair get a track meet makeover, but so did our pits, and all with the help of Harris's handy shot put chalk.

(holds out chalk to HARRIS)

Here you go, Harris.

HARRIS

No thanks. You keep it.

MOORE

Ooh! Free swag. Thanks!

(hands the chalk to TAYLOR, who puts it in the purse)

And that's going to do it today for Track Meet Makeover. Tune in tomorrow when Taylor and I try out the long jump where we'll have the best tanning tips for laying out on the sand.

HARRIS

(rolling his eyes)

You do realize that sand is for jumping, right?

MOORE

See you then!

(MOORE and TAYLOR wave at the camera and make faces as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the shot put. That's final call for the shot put. All competitors to the throwing circle.

(HARRIS shakes his head, grabs his shot put and jogs off, leaving MOORE and TAYLOR mugging for the camera as lights fade.)

ACT ONE

Scene Five: Relay

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. MARTIN, JACKSON, BROWN, and WILSON enter. MARTIN holds a relay baton. BROWN has her phone and is distracted, looking at it.

MARTIN

I think we have a good chance against the Bulldogs but we need to work on our handoffs.

JACKSON

I know I need to pick it up a little on the curve.

WILSON

So do I.

MARTIN

We all need to try and pick up the pace where we can, but if our handoffs are bad, those curves aren't going to matter.

WILSON

And don't forget that those handoffs need to occur in the changeover box. We almost got DQ'd at the last meet because Brown was trying to pass the baton to me outside of the box.

(seeing that BROWN isn't paying attention)

Okay, Brown? You heard what I said?

BROWN

(distracted)

Mmmm.

WILSON

About the handoffs? In the changeover box? You got that, Brown?

BROWN

(still distracted)

Hmmm. Yeah...

WILSON

(annoyed)

So when you're racing that little toadstool guy around the track in your go-cart you're gonna make sure to hit him with a lot of red shells, right, Brown?

BROWN

(still distracted)

Yep. You got it!

MARTIN, JACKSON and BROWN

(yelling)

Brown!

BROWN

(finally looking up from her phone)

What?

JACKSON

Would you pay attention? We're talking strategy here.

BROWN

Don't worry, I heard every word....watch out for red shells in the changeover box. I've got it!

MARTIN

Whatever. The race is coming up, so let's work on those handoffs. Jackson and I will start.

(MARTIN, JACKSON, BROWN, and WILSON line up across the stage, in that order. WILSON does some warmups and practice starts while BROWN flips through her phone. MARTIN and JACKSON jog and pass the baton a couple of times during the next few lines.)

MARTIN

If you can hold it out a little sooner, I think that would help.

JACKSON

Like this?

MARTIN

Yeah. That'll work. Let's try it again.

(hands JACKSON the baton and they do it again)

JACKSON

How was that one?

MARTIN

Good. Better.

JACKSON

Want to run it again?

(JACKSON reaches out her hand and grips one end of the baton, but MARTIN holds onto it, and looks around, then leans in, so that they are both holding one end of the baton.)

MARTIN

Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something.

JACKSON

(leaning in)

What's up?

MARTIN

Did you hear about that post from last night?

JACKSON

The one about the student council president with the spaghetti on her face or the one where the swim team threw a cat in the pool?

MARTIN

Neither.

(looks around and leans in)

The one about Wilson.

JACKSON
(looking back at WILSON)

Our Wilson?

MARTIN

Yeah.

JACKSON
(intrigued)

No. What was it?

MARTIN
(feigning having reservations)

I don't know if I should say...

JACKSON

C'mon! You've gotta tell me!

MARTIN

Okay.

(looks around again, then leans in)

So you know how she's new to our school this year?

JACKSON

Yeah.

MARTIN

Well, I can't say who, but someone posted that Wilson gave the school a fake address so she could come here and run on our track team.

JACKSON

Why would she do that?

MARTIN

Because she thinks she's better than the rest of us and if she runs on our team then college recruiters are going to notice her instead.

JACKSON

So she's not supposed to go to this school?

MARTIN

Nope. Apparently she doesn't even live in this district. She lives—
(looks around, then leans in)

Downtown.

JACKSON

No way.

MARTIN

Yep. I guess she thinks she's gonna get recruited by some big fancy school who will give her all this money and cars and stuff and then maybe she'll go to the Olympics.

JACKSON

(scoffs)

Please. She's not that good.

MARTIN

I know, right?

WILSON

(calling out)

Are we gonna work on our handoffs or are you two gonna hog the baton all day?

MARTIN

(calling out to WILSON)

We'll be done in a minute!

(leaning back in)

You don't think she heard us, do you?

JACKSON

I doubt it. She's probably too busy telling herself how awesome she is to hear us anyway!

MARTIN

Seriously!

(They giggle, then MARTIN releases the baton. She warms up as JACKSON turns to BROWN.)

JACKSON

Hey, Brown, are you ready?

BROWN

(not looking up from her phone)

Mmmmm hmmm.

JACKSON

(holds out the baton)

You gonna put your phone away and take this baton or what?

BROWN

(without looking up from her phone)

Totally. Couldn't agree more.

(JACKSON crosses to BROWN and shoves one end of the baton in BROWN'S hand.)

JACKSON

If you're not going to work on handoffs, do you at least want to hear about this post that's going around online?

BROWN

(looks up)

Post? Where?

(scrolling through her phone)

Tik Tik? Insta? Snapchat?

(BROWN keeps scrolling through her phone during the next exchange, never looking up. As before, JACKSON and BROWN each hold one end of the baton.)

JACKSON

Who cares. Listen to this.

(looks over at WILSON, then around, then back to BROWN)

So you know Wilson?

BROWN

Mmmm hmmm.

JACKSON

I guess she created a secret identity to get into this school.

BROWN

Huh. Whoa.

JACKSON

Yeah. And that's not all.

(looks around, then leans in)

I guess she got like a car and designer clothes and a bunch of money to come here too. And now she thinks she's like a celebrity or something.

BROWN

Wow. Crazy.

JACKSON

And she's probably going to do it again...lie and cheat, I mean...so she can go to the Olympics, or whatever.

BROWN

Hmmm.

JACKSON

I know. Can you believe it? I never would've thought she would be like that, but I guess so.

BROWN

Guess so.

WILSON

(calling out, annoyed)

You know the race is going to start any minute. I'd love to practice some handoffs too.

JACKSON

(calling out to WILSON)

Almost done!

(to BROWN, with a smirk)

Better not keep the superstar waiting.

(JACKSON lets go of the baton, then crosses to MARTIN. They warm up and gossip as BROWN turns to WILSON and holds out the baton, still scrolling on her phone with her other hand. WILSON takes the other end of the baton.)

WILSON

So what was all that about?

BROWN

Hmmm?

WILSON

All that back there? Martin and Jackson with their heads locked together? Jackson whispering something to you?

BROWN

Oh, that? It was just about some post.

WILSON

What post?

BROWN

Someone from school. Someone on our team.

WILSON

What about them?

BROWN

I guess they're a secret spy for the other team or whatever. And they took a bunch of bribes to come here so they could spy for the other school.

WILSON

Really? Someone on our team?

BROWN

Yeah. I know, crazy right?

WILSON

Why would they do something so horrible?

BROWN

I guess so they can go to the Olympics? It sounds like they got some sort of celebrity deal...a book or a movie or something.

WILSON

So they're selling out their teammates to get what they want for themselves?

BROWN

Mmmm hmmm.

WILSON

Wow. That's awful. Did Jackson say who it was?

BROWN

You know what, I think she did. It was...

(looks up, thinking, then remembers)

Wilson!

WILSON

(shocked)

Wilson?

BROWN

Yep.

WILSON

(upset)

That's me.

BROWN

I thought your name was Alex?

WILSON

It is. Alex Wilson.

BROWN

Oh. Right.

BROWN (Cont.)
(awkwardly)

Congrats on your movie deal.

(WILSON snatches the baton and crosses angrily to MARTIN and JACKSON followed by BROWN.)

WILSON
(furious)

So you think I'm some kind of secret spy for the Bulldogs?

MARTIN

What? No, that's not what I said.

WILSON

And apparently I took bribes so I can go to the Olympics and get a movie deal?

JACKSON

What are you talking about?

WILSON

You tell me! I guess it's all posted online and everyone is talking about it, including the three of you...which really sucks, because we're supposed to be a team. Which is why I joined this relay in the first place...I like running and I was new here and I thought joining the relay team would help me meet people who loved running as much as I do. But I didn't expect that my teammates would be a bunch of gossips who care more about relaying rumors than getting to know me. Because the truth is, I'm not a spy, or an Olympian, or a celebrity. I'm just someone who likes to run and who could be a really good friend if you only cared more about getting to know me instead of reading some stupid post on the internet.

(hands the baton to MARTIN, staring her in the eye, angrily)

Here. I'll hand this back to you. Our starter. See you out there.

(All but BROWN look up as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the four by two hundred relay. That's final call for the four by two hundred relay. All competitors to the starting line.

(WILSON exits angrily. MARTIN and JACKSON look at one another, shocked, then job after her. BROWN hangs back a moment, scrolling through her phone, oblivious, then looks up and jogs after them as lights fade.)

ACT ONE
Scene Six: Discus

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. LEWIS is center, holding a discus and practicing his form...arms extending, spinning his leg around his body, etc. His eyes are closed.

LEWIS

(to himself, as he completes the body motions)

Grip the discus....extend the arm...shift the weight...and...spin!

(nods, happy with how that went)

Good. That was a good one. Again.

(LEWIS crosses back to his starting place and starts again, eyes closed. As he goes through the motions, CLARK enters, sees LEWIS, and happily crosses over, excited to see him.)

Grip the discus....extend the arm...shift the weight...and...

CLARK

Hey Lewis!

LEWIS

(startles, eyes opening)

Ah!

(sees CLARK)

Dude! I didn't see you there.

CLARK

Probably because you had your eyes closed.

LEWIS

I was concentrating. Going through my drills with my eyes closed helps with me with body awareness.

CLARK

Cool.

LEWIS

Yeah.

(waits a moment)

So, if you don't mind...

CLARK

Oh, I don't mind at all. Go ahead.

(maybe sits, or stands a couple of steps away)

LEWIS

You're gonna stay?

CLARK

Yep.

LEWIS

Okay. But I'm just going to be doing these drills before my event starts.

CLARK

I totally get it. Go for it.

LEWIS

Alright.

(crosses back to his starting place and starts again, eyes closed)

Grip the discus....extend the arm...shift the weight...and...

CLARK

Speaking of weight—

LEWIS

(startles, eyes opening)

Ah!

CLARK

(continues)

Did you hear about that mastodon jaw some guy found in his backyard? I bet that weighed a ton.

LEWIS

I'm sure it did. But can we talk about this some other time? I have to finish these drills.

CLARK

(ignoring him)

I guess it was just sitting there, poking through the plants in his garden bed! There were teeth sticking up through his ficuses!

(thinks)

Is that right? Ficuses? Ficci? Fico? What is the plural of ficus?

LEWIS

I don't know. But can we discuss this later?

CLARK

Sure. No problem.

LEWIS

Thanks.

(LEWIS crosses back to his starting place and starts again, eyes closed.)

LEWIS

Grip the discus....extend the arm...shift the—

CLARK

Speaking of shifts—

LEWIS

(startles, eyes opening)

Ah!

CLARK

(continues)

Did you know that child labor doesn't just exist in third world countries? It's happening right here!

LEWIS

You don't say? Listen—

CLARK

I wish someone would listen to them! The children! Some of them as young as eight years old working an average of seventy-two hours a week!

LEWIS

Seriously? That's a lot.

CLARK

I know!

LEWIS

My dad doesn't even work that much.

CLARK

My dad doesn't work at all, so yeah... that's crazy. Speaking of unemployment, did you hear the new statistic that eleven percent of men aged 25-54 don't have a job and aren't looking for one?

LEWIS

No, I didn't, but—

CLARK

My dad is definitely part of that eleven percent. He's forty-six and my mom said if he doesn't get off the couch and find a job soon he's going to have to live with his sister. And he hates his sister. She has twenty-three cats. And he's allergic to all of them.

LEWIS

That stinks. Now—

CLARK

You're not kidding! Twenty-three cats!

(waving a hand in front of his nose)

Have you ever smelled a house that has twenty-three cats in it? Disgusting. That's a lot of litter boxes. And probably some of the cats don't even use the litter boxes. Which I guess means they're littering all over the house.

(thinks)

If that's what it's called...littering. Litter-i? Litter-o? You know what I mean.

LEWIS

(Sighs)

No. I really don't.

CLARK

When cats go to the bathroom.

LEWIS

I think that's just called poo—

CLARK

Or maybe they call it litter because they're leaving their waste around the house.

(thinks)

Speaking of litter, did you know there is an estimated seventy-five to one hundred and ninety-nine million tons of plastic waste in the ocean?

LEWIS

(resigned)

I did not.

CLARK

It's true! And an additional thirty-three billion pounds of plastic enters the ocean each year!

That's a lot of litter!

LEWIS

It sure is. Now I really need to get back to my drills.

CLARK

Don't let me keep you.

(LEWIS starts to walk back to his starting position, then stops and turns.)

LEWIS

You know, I'm gonna be at this all the way until my event starts. If you want, I'll just finish this up and then I'll come find you and we can chat about ocean trash and cat poop and whatever else you want to discuss. You don't have to hang out here.

CLARK

I don't mind, really.

LEWIS

(sighs)

Okay, but I really need to concentrate.

CLARK

No problem.

LEWIS

Alright.

(crosses back to his starting place and starts again, eyes closed)

LEWIS

Grip the discus....extend the arm—

CLARK

Speaking of arms—

LEWIS

(startled, getting mad)

Not again!

CLARK

(continuing)

Did you hear about the new bionic arm they developed that can be controlled with your mind?

LEWIS

Can *you* control your mind? Maybe shut it down for the next five minutes?

CLARK

I think you're thinking of meditation, which is a practice that dates back to five thousand BCE and has ties to ancient Egypt and China.

LEWIS

(shaking his head)

You've got to be kidding me.

CLARK

Hey, you know you might want to consider meditating before your event. It might help you clear your mind and focus which could really improve your form.

(leaning in)

I didn't want to say anything, but you're spins are looking a little sloppy.

LEWIS

(through gritted teeth)

You don't say?

CLARK

I did a little reading on discus before I came over here. Did you know the discus throw originated in ancient Greece around seven hundred and eight BC as part of the modern decathlon?

LEWIS

No, I didn't. And I don't *need* to know that. Nor do I need to know the average lifespan of a sloth, or the rate of decline of the Arctic sea or the square root of sixty-three!

CLARK

Actually, the square root of sixty-three isn't a whole number so it's a little trickier to determine than you—

(realizing)

But that's not the point is it?

LEWIS

No. It's not.

CLARK

You'd like me to be quiet now, wouldn't you?

LEWIS

If you don't mind.

CLARK

No worries. I can do that. I'm picking up what you're laying down. Mum's the word. I'll just be over here, keeping it zipped.

LEWIS

Thank you.

(LEWIS starts to cross to starting position, then stops and turns back, looking CLARK. CLARK does a zipping motion across his lips. LEWIS turns back and crosses to his starting area. He takes a deep breath, then starts again, eyes closed.)

Grip the discus....extend the—

CLARK

Speaking of zippers, did you know they got their name from the cool sound they make?
(mimes zipping)

Zzzzzip!

LEWIS

Ah!

(LEWIS throws his hands in the air as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for discus. That's final call for discus. All competitors to throwing circle.

(LEWIS exits angrily as CLARK follows, still talking.)

CLARK

In the U.S. people use four point five billion zippers every year. That's a lot of zippers! They're seen on all sorts of clothing now, but they were first used only on boots and tobacco pouches. Now they're even used in space!

(LEWIS and CLARK exit. Feel free to add more zipper facts if need be to complete the exit. Lights fade. End of Act One.)

ACT TWO
Scene One: Get Set...

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. An OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.

OFFICIAL

Last call for the 1600 meter run. That's last call for the 1600. All competitors to the starting line.

(SMITH, JAMES and YOUNG enter, perhaps not all at once. They line up, staggered. If OFFICIAL is present, perhaps he raises the starting pistol. Otherwise, we hear—)

On your marks...

(SMITH, JAMES and YOUNG, crouch down, in their starting positions, heads down.)

Get set...

(The runners come straighten their back legs and come up a little. A moment later, JAMES'S head shoots up, then turns to audience.)

JAMES

There's so much to think about...before we graduate. Do we have the credits we need? Are our grades and extra-curriculars good enough to get into our dream college? Do we even *want* to go to college, or is there a trade school or apprenticeship that might be a better fit? Researching. Planning. For what is to come.

(looks down)

Get set.

(stands and turns to audience)

So the other day my mom takes me shopping. Says it a surprise. Says I'm going to love it. And now I'm excited, because I've had my eye on these really cool new tan and gold Nikes that I know are expensive and not in the budget and something my mom would never buy for me, because

(in "mom" voice, mispronouncing Nikes, rhyming it with bike)

"You already have a perfectly good pair of sneakers that I bought on sale back in the fall. You don't need that Nike smoosh on the side. The ones you have are just fine."

(rolls his eyes; now in normal voice)

Because my mom does not get it. Like ever. She doesn't know how important it is to be cool and that being cool costs money. But, like, graduation is coming, and maybe, just this once, she's going to splurge. So we get in the car and drive to the department store. We go inside and make our way to the rear of the store. Now I'm getting really excited, because that's where the shoe department is. Plus I've already checked their stock online and know they have the Nikes in stock and in my size. The anticipation is killing me, so I'm walking a few steps ahead of her, closing in on the shoe department, headed straight for those shelves chock full of those glorious orange boxes when suddenly I hear,

(in "mom" voice)

"What do you think of the blue ones?"

JAMES (Cont.)

(in normal voice; in a hushed, horrified tone)

Only, we're not talking about shoes. In fact, my mom's not even in the shoe department. She's in...

(looks around, panicked, then turns to audience)

Housewares! As in sheets. Towels. Pots. Pans....Shams! What the heck is a sham? It's not a pillowcase. It's not part of the comforter. It's apparently meant to be decorative, but if you ask me it's a frilly, embroidered nightmare. And don't get me started on dust ruffles! So I ask my mom what the big surprise is, and she turns to me, her hands grasping a brand new twin sheet set, her smile slightly quivering, her eyes slowly filling with tears, and says, "I thought we could pick up a few things for your dorm room. Get you ready for next year.

(a beat; realizes)

And right there, in the housewares department ...under the harsh florescent lights and with the overwhelming scent of three wick candles tickling my nose...I see it in her eyes. Her hopes. Her fears. Her excitement for what my future could hold mixed with her own sadness at knowing in a few short months she has to let me go. She's spent her whole life making sure I had everything I need...from school supplies to lunches...from a cheering section in the stands, to a shoulder to cry on. And here she was again, making sure I had everything I needed so that when the time came for me to walk out that door, I'd be prepared.

(a beat; smiles)

I took the sheets from her outstretched hands and smiled.

(as if talking to mom)

Blue is great, mom.

(thinks, nods, then walks back to starting line)

Our future is right around the corner.

(crouches down, as before)

Get set.

(Lights change; end of scene)

ACT TWO

Scene Two: Steeplechase

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. WALKER is looking offstage, watching and cheering. He's holding a towel.

WALKER

(calling out loudly)

Come on, Miller! You've got to pick up the pace!

(watches for a moment, reacting, not pleased with what he's seeing, then calling out again)

You've got to go faster if you're going to clear that water pit.

(watches again, cringing)

No, Miller, not yet!

WALKER (Cont.)

(watches again, really worried)

You're never going to make it!

(really worried now, maybe crouching, with a hand to his mouth)

Miller, watch out!

(A large splashing noise is heard. WALKER reacts, grimacing.)

Well that wasn't good.

(MILLER enters, dripping wet. WALKER holds out a towel.)

Don't worry you'll do better next time.

MILLER

(drying himself off)

I'm never gonna get this.

WALKER

Sure you will. You've just got to keep practicing.

MILLER

Who ever thought the steeplechase was a good idea? A three-thousand meter run...plus five giant barriers...plus a massive twelve foot water pit!

WALKER

(chuckling)

Yeah, it's kind of wacky.

MILLER

And what a stupid name? Steeplechase? That's nowhere near as cool as the one hundred meter dash or pole vault. Or the hammer. The hammer! How cool do you have to be to compete in the hammer? But the steeplechase! Seriously?

WALKER

I think it was a UK thing. People raced from one church to the other since their steeples were easy to see from long distances.

MILLER

So that's why this race is so long.

WALKER

Right.

MILLER

And the barriers? Who came up with that bright idea?

WALKER

I think the barriers symbolize stone walls and other obstacles they had to jump over.

MILLER

So the water pit symbolizes...

WALKER

Water...as in lakes and streams. I thought that one was pretty obvious.

MILLER

Yeah, sorry.

(tips his head to one side and pats his head)

I've got so much water in my ears I'm not thinking straight.

WALKER

(laughs)

There isn't that much water in the pit.

MILLER

Maybe not, but what used to be in there is now firmly lodged in my head.

WALKER

How is that even possible?

MILLER

Well, when your jump isn't high enough and your shoe catches on the barrier and you tumble face first in the pit of water and your competitors jump on your head like a child jumps from rock to rock when crossing a stream, then yeah....you get a little water in your ears.

WALKER

Got it.

MILLER

I hate the steeplechase.

WALKER

Then why do you do it?

MILLER

Coach is making me.

WALKER

How can Coach make you?

MILLER

He said if I want to be on the track team I have to run an event.

WALKER

So pick a different event.

MILLER

I can't.

WALKER

Why not?

MILLER

I already tried them all.

WALKER

There's no way that's true. There are a ton of track and field events.

MILLER

I know. And I'm terrible at every single one.

WALKER

The one hundred meter dash?

MILLER

Yep.

WALKER

The two hundred?

MILLER

Horrible.

WALKER

The sixteen hundred?

MILLER

The longer they get, the worse I am at them.

WALKER

Fine. How about hurdles?

MILLER

Do you even need to ask?

WALKER

Right. Long jump?

MILLER

Landed face first in the sand.

WALKER

Ouch. Pole vault?

MILLER

Literally vaulted myself into a neighbor's swimming pool.

WALKER

Eek. Okay, Shot put.

MILLER

Did you hear about Coach's car window getting broken?

WALKER

I did!

MILLER

That was the day I tried shot put.

WALKER

Oof.

MILLER

Yeah, Coach wasn't happy.

WALKER

What about the relays?

MILLER

Running *and* passing a baton? Have you met me?

WALKER

Good point.

(thinks)

That's just about every track and field event.

MILLER

And like I told you before, I'm terrible at every single one! Steeplechase is the last event and if I don't run it, I'm off the team.

WALKER

Have you ever stopped to think that track and field is just not your thing?

MILLER

All the time. Trust me, I *know* it's not my thing.

WALKER

Then why are you doing it?

MILLER

Because I need more extracurriculars!

WALKER

I thought you had plenty of extracurriculars. Aren't you president of the chess club?

MILLER

Yes.

WALKER

And the Spanish Club?

MILLER

Si, senior! And the French Club too.

WALKER

You take Spanish and French?

MILLER

Oui, oui.

WALKER

Wow.

MILLER

(counting on his fingers as he lists)

I'm also the treasurer for Student Council, vice president of our school's chapter of the National Honor Society, I'm in the Key Club, Coding Club, History Club, Cooking Club, Robotics Club, Tabletop Club, and I'm a founding member of Kids for KPop.

WALKER

As in Korean boy bands?

MILLER

They're really good! I'll send you a playlist.

WALKER

That sounds like plenty of extracurriculars to me.

MILLER

Oh, that's not all. I'm also the editor of the school paper, a baritone in the school choir, I'm on the Science Olympiad team, I'm first chair trombone in the orchestra and I played the gate in the Drama Club's spring production of Xanadu.

WALKER

There's a gate in Xanadu?

MILLER

There was in ours!

(swings open and closed like a gate)

WALKER

It sounds to me like you've got plenty of extracurriculars.

MILLER

It may sound like a lot, but the best colleges want their applicants to be well rounded, and to be well rounded, I need an athletic sport. So here I am.

WALKER

I don't think it works like that. You should be just fine with the other ten clubs you belong to.

MILLER

Achtzehn.

WALKER

Bless you.

MILLER

Oh, that wasn't a sneeze. Achtzehn means eighteen in German.

WALKER

(incredulous)

You speak German too?

MILLER

No. But they didn't have enough kids in German Club to qualify for their trip to Berlin this summer so they let me join.

WALKER

So that's eighteen clubs.

MILLER

Not counting the track team.

WALKER

Which clearly you need to quit.

MILLER

I can't! I won't!

WALKER

Then you're going to need to practice so you don't get killed running the steeplechase.

MILLER

Don't worry. I'll practice hard every day so that I'm better for next week's race.

WALKER

What about today's race?

MILLER

What do you mean?

(points offstage)

Didn't you see me in that race back there? I was a disaster.

WALKER

I did see that.

MILLER

So we agree, then.

WALKER

That you were a disaster? Yes. That you were running a race...I'm afraid not.

MILLER

What are you talking about? I did all the steeplechase things...I ran the three-thousand meters, I jumped over the barriers. I even made it across the water pit!

WALKER

(chuckling)

Eventually.

MILLER

I ran the race!

WALKER

You ran the practice race. The actual race starts...

(looks at his watch)

Any minute.

MILLER
(panicked)

You don't mean—

(They look up as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the steeplechase. That's final call for the steeplechase. All competitors to the starting line.

MILLER
(as he exits)

I'm never going to make it out of this race alive.

WALKER
(holding up towel)

Don't forget your towel!

(WALKER runs after MILLER, exiting as lights fade.)

ACT TWO
Scene Three: Hurdles

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. A hurdle or two are center stage. MATTHEWS is doing high knees while stepping or hopping over hurdles, as a warmup. SCOTT enters and crosses to her.

SCOTT

Looking good, Matthews.

MATTHEWS

Thanks. Just trying to get a little extra mobility in my hip sockets so that maybe I'll stand a chance against Garcia.

SCOTT

Ooh, yeah, Garcia is a beast.

MATTHEWS

She's awesome. Did you hear she set a school record at their last meet?

SCOTT

No, I didn't. But I'm not surprised. She's been killing it this season.

MATTHEWS

Yeah. It's probably a long shot, but I would love to beat her one last time.

SCOTT

Dude, you can totally beat Garcia. You're the best hurdler in our division.

MATTHEWS

I don't know about that.

SCOTT

You totally are! I'm sure Garcia is over there, puking her guts out at the thought of facing you.

MATTHEWS

(chuckles and starts another warmup)

Okay, now you're *really* full of it.

SCOTT

I'm serious! Garcia doesn't stand a chance against you.

MATTHEWS

We'll see about that.

SCOTT

And on the off chance she actually does pull out a W today, you can always rematch at the county meet at the end of the month.

MATTHEWS

(solemnly)

I don't think so.

SCOTT

No, really. You and Garcia will definitely qualify for the county meet. You'll probably be the top two seeds.

MATTHEWS

Maybe.

SCOTT

Not maybe. For sure!

MATTHEWS

Doesn't really matter anyway.

SCOTT

Course it does! Your seed determines which heat you'll race in.

MATTHEWS

I know. I just meant it won't matter what my seed is because I won't be racing in the county meet.

SCOTT

Won't be racing? What are you talking about?

MATTHEWS

This will be my last meet.

SCOTT

Your last meet? Why?

MATTHEWS

I just...I have too much going on.

SCOTT

But it's your senior year!

MATTHEWS

I know.

SCOTT

And your grades are fine, aren't they?

MATTHEWS

Yeah.

SCOTT

So I don't get it.

(During the next few lines their discussion becomes heated until they are yelling.)

MATTHEWS

You don't need to get it. You just need to be my friend.

SCOTT

I am your friend. Which is why I find it totally crazy that you want to quit track in the middle of the season.

MATTHEWS

I never said I wanted to quit.

SCOTT

Then don't.

MATTHEWS

I have to!

SCOTT

Why?

MATTHEWS

(yelling)

Because my dad's sick, okay?

SCOTT

(after a beat)

What?

MATTHEWS

(turning away and busying herself)

Yeah, so he has to take off work for treatments or whatever and it's going to be really expensive.

SCOTT

That sucks.

MATTHEWS

My parents haven't been able to save much money so my mom's gonna see about picking up some overtime which means I need to drive my brothers to and from school and maybe get a part time job myself.

SCOTT

Oh.

MATTHEWS

Yeah.

(a beat)

So there isn't going to be time for track anymore.

SCOTT

Got it.

(a beat)

I had no idea.

MATTHEWS

(calming down, but still upset)

Well we just found out last night. So there was no way you could've known

SCOTT

I'm so sorry.

MATTHEWS

Thanks.

SCOTT

(crosses to MATTHEWS)

That's a lot.

MATTHEWS

It's fine.

SCOTT

No, it's not.

(puts a hand on MATTHEWS'S shoulder)

MATTHEWS

(steps away)

Well, it happens. And it happened to us. To my dad. To me.

SCOTT

But you're so good at this, Matthews. You could win the county championship...go to states... maybe even get a scholarship and run for a university.

MATTHEWS

Yeah, well, too bad none of that is going to happen.

SCOTT

There must be a way—

MATTHEWS

(angrily)

Get it through your head—I'm done. Today is my last meet. Nothing we can do about it.

SCOTT

There's gotta be something we can do. Maybe if we asked Coach...

MATTHEWS

What is Coach going to do? He can't remove the cancer from my dad's body. He can't double my mom's salary so she doesn't have to pick up extra shifts. He can't do anything...except find someone else to take my place on the team.

SCOTT

No one can take your place.

MATTHEWS

Please. Two seconds after I'm gone it'll be like I was never here.

SCOTT

No way.

(there's a pause, then, with a little bit of a smirk)

Garcia's gonna be happy you're gone.

MATTHEWS

(with a little smile)

No kidding.

SCOTT

She knows she could never win as long as you're around.

MATTHEWS

I could beat her with one leg tied behind my back!

SCOTT

(laughs)

I don't think it's possible to hurdle with only one leg!

MATTHEWS

If anyone could do it, I could.

SCOTT

For sure! I can't wait to see the look on her face at the county meet when she sees you're not there.

MATTHEWS

You'll have to tell me about it.

SCOTT

I will.

(a beat)

I'm sorry.

MATTHEWS

It's okay. I know you didn't mean it like that.

SCOTT

No. I mean...

(puts her hand on MATTHEW's shoulder)

I'm sorry.

MATTHEWS

I know.

SCOTT

It's just so unfair.

MATTHEWS

It's life. Sometimes everything goes your way...the track is clear, there's nothing chasing at your heels, no obstacles in your way. All you have to do is turn your face to the sun and run.
(looks down)

And sometimes life keeps throwing hurdles at you, and no matter how fast you run...how high you jump...you just can't clear them.

SCOTT

I'd help you clear them if I could.

MATTHEWS

I know. And I appreciate that.

SCOTT

At least you've got one more race.

MATTHEWS

(brightening)

That's right! And I'm going to make it my biggest win yet!

SCOTT

Garcia's not gonna know what hit her!

MATTHEWS

She's gonna eat my dust!

SCOTT

They all are!

(They stop, realizing as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the three hundred meter hurdles. That's final call for the three hundred meter hurdles. All competitors to the starting line.

(SCOTT and MATTHEWS look at one another. MATTHEWS nods and smiles. SCOTT puts her arm around MATTHEWS and they exit as lights fade.)

ACT TWO
Scene Four: Pole Vault

AT RISE: A high school track, moments before the start of a race. THOMAS is standing center, facing a large vaulting pole that he is holding upright. He is speaking to the pole.

THOMAS
(nervously)

Hey there, Avery. I don't know if you've heard, but prom is coming up soon and—
(pretends to listen)

So you heard? And you're really hoping someone special will ask you to go as their date?
(pretends to listen, then smiles)

Well, today is your lucky day because I *am* that special someone.
(turns away from pole, shaking his head)

I am that special someone? C'mon, Thomas, you can do better than that.

(THOMAS gets prepared, psyching himself up, then turns back to the pole, trying to act cool. As he begins his speech, NELSON enters, and watches, amused.)

Yo, Avery! What up? You wanna go to prom or what?

NELSON
(imitating HILL)

Oh, yes, Thomas. Please take me to prom. You're so tough and cool.

(THOMAS quickly puts pole behind his back, which is still clearly visible.)

THOMAS

Nelson, hey. How's it going?

NELSON
(chuckling)

It's going a lot better now! Please, go on. I believe you were in the middle of asking that pole to prom? Don't let me disturb you.

THOMAS
(indicating pole)

Oh, this? This is nothing. It's just my vaulting pole. My event is coming up soon.

NELSON
(crossing to THOMAS)

I know what it is. I pole vault too.

THOMAS

You do? Since when?

NELSON

Since now. But we need to talk about something, Thomas. Calling your vaulting pole, nothing?
(takes the pole)

Why, you wouldn't want to hurt her feelings would you? Not when you're trying to ask her to prom!

THOMAS

(trying to get his pole back)

Give it back, Nelson. It's not like that.

NELSON

(keeping the pole away from THOMAS)

I know she looks a little banged up right now—

(aside to THOMAS)

Occupational hazard—she is a vaulting pole after all—

(back to pole, sizing it up)

But with a little polish and the right outfit, she'll make a beautiful date to the prom.

(leans into the pole, as if taking a prom photo)

Don't you think?

THOMAS

(snatches the pole back from NELSON)

Cut it out. This is difficult enough as it is.

NELSON

Pole vaulting? Yeah, I heard you weren't any good. That's why Coach asked me to step in and compete today.

THOMAS

No, not pole vaulting!

(realizing)

Although, seriously? Coach doesn't think I'm any good?

NELSON

Let's put it this way...he said you couldn't vault over a dandelion if it withered up and fell down right in front of you.

THOMAS

Ouch.

NELSON

Yeah. But don't worry, I'll get us some points.

THOMAS

But you've never even pole vaulted before!

NELSON

So?

THOMAS

So it takes skill and practice! You can't just pick up a pole and do it!

NELSON

Watch me!

(NELSON takes the pole from THOMAS, crosses to one side of the stage, then runs toward the other side with perfect technique. He runs offstage where presumably he pole vaults perfectly as THOMAS watches in amazement.)

THOMAS

Whoa!

(NELSON enters, smugly, carrying the pole.)

NELSON

See?

THOMAS

How did you do that?

NELSON

It's not that difficult.

THOMAS

It's actually extremely difficult! Ask anyone! It's the most difficult field event there is!

NELSON

(shrugs)

Not for me, I guess.

THOMAS

(sighs)

So you're that guy, huh? The ultra-confidant guy who's good at anything he tries?

NELSON

(thinks, then nods)

Yeah. That pretty much sums it up.

THOMAS

Then can you help me with something?

NELSON

If it's pole vaulting, then I'm sorry to say there's nothing I can do.

(indicating THOMAS'S legs)

There's no way those noodles are going to propel you over any bar, no matter how low.

THOMAS

No, I don't need help with pole vaulting.

(stops and thinks)

Although, I'm really starting to feel like maybe I should try another field event.

NELSON

Yes. Yes you should

THOMAS

The thing I need your help with is a little more...personal.

NELSON

Sorry, dude. I have no answers for why your knee-pit looks like that.

(bends to look at the back of THOMAS'S knee)

I'd probably go see a doctor, though. That knee-pit's looking *angry*!

THOMAS

No! It's not my knee pit!

(tries to look at the back of his knee, unsuccessfully, then stops)

It's Avery!

NELSON

Avery?

THOMAS

You know...

(looks around, then leans in)

Avery Green...she does the long jump?

NELSON

Right! Good ole' Green Bean!

(realizes)

Wait a minute...do you like Green Bean?

THOMAS

(sighs)

I do kinda have a crush on Avery Green, yes.

NELSON

And is that who you were pretending this pole was?

THOMAS

Yeah.

NELSON

Huh? I never thought of Green Bean as the crushable type, but I guess I can see it.

THOMAS

I want to ask her to prom, but I have no idea what to say or do.

NELSON

(putting his arm around THOMAS)

Well good thing your old buddy Nelson is here to help! I'm an expert at prom-posals.

THOMAS

What's a prom-posal?

NELSON

It's what you do when you ask someone to prom.

THOMAS

So you've asked someone? You've got a date to prom?

NELSON

Me? No.

(chuckles)

I'm keeping my options open. But I'm totally down to help you.

THOMAS

Great! What do I need to do?

NELSON

Well first things first, what are some things she's totally into?

THOMAS

(thinks)

Well, there's the long jump.

NELSON

Okay. You know her field event. That's a start.

THOMAS

And I'm pretty sure she likes math. We both took math this year.

NELSON

Number one...no one likes math. And B...everyone has to that class. It's a requirement. What else you got?

THOMAS

I don't know....

(wracking his brain)

I think she likes chocolate.

NELSON

Most girls do. Good.

THOMAS

And I'm pretty sure she's allergic to peanuts. I saw her eating lunch at the peanut free table.

NELSON

Noted. No Reese's for Green Bean. What else?

THOMAS

(encouraged)

Oh! She's really into big cats!

NELSON

Like Garfield? Big, fat, lasagna eating cats?

THOMAS

No! Like Lions, Tigers, and Cheetahs!

NELSON

Oh, my!

(thinks)

Okay, so what do we know...she does the long jump...she likes chocolate but can't have peanuts...and she likes big cats, but not the kind that eat lasagna.

THOMAS

And she likes math.

NELSON

Again...no one likes math. But that's okay, because we have plenty to work with already.

THOMAS

We do?

NELSON

Yep. I know just what you need to do—you know those little gold wrapped chocolate coins?

THOMAS

Yeah..

NELSON

Get as many of those as you can.

THOMAS

Okay.

NELSON

Next we're going to need a tiger.

THOMAS

Like a plush tiger?

NELSON

No. A real tiger. Like from the zoo.

THOMAS

Where am I going to get a tiger?

NELSON

I'm pretty sure I just told you...from the zoo.

THOMAS

I can't get a tiger!

NELSON

That's okay.

THOMAS

(relieved)

Phew.

NELSON

A lion will work too.

THOMAS

(incredulous)

A lion!

NELSON

Now what you're gonna want to do is saddle up that lion...or tiger...or whatever big cat you can get your hands on. Then just as Green Bean is about to do her long jump, you enter, riding your lion, and throwing chocolate coins in the air.

THOMAS

This is crazy!

NELSON

I agree. You'll want a crazy amount of chocolate coins. Like way more than you think you'll need—you're really gonna want to make it rain. So you're riding this tiger—

THOMAS

Lion.

NELSON

Right. You're riding this lion and sky is filled with chocolate coins. She's gonna be shocked. She's gonna be impressed. She might be a little worried that those chocolate coins have peanuts, so you'll say to her, 'Don't worry Green Bean'—

THOMAS

Avery.

NELSON

Right. "Don't worry, Avery, I got you covered. Those coins are peanut-free. Now what I want to know is, are *you* free...to go to prom with me?"

(holds pole horizontally)

Boom!

(NELSON drops the pole like a mic-drop, but THOMAS catches.)

THOMAS

That's kind of a lot.

NELSON

(smiles, proud)

I know.

THOMAS

You really think it will work?

NELSON

You'll never know until you try.

(looks at the pole)

Kind of like pole vaulting...sometimes you just have to give it your all and hope you make it to the other side.

THOMAS

(impressed)

Wow, Nelson, that was pretty good.

NELSON

I know. I told you...I'm good at everything.

THOMAS

Maybe you're right about the prom-posal thing too. I guess I'll have to try and get everything together and find the right time to ask Avery.

(GREEN enters.)

NELSON

Looks like you're gonna get your chance right now. Here she comes!

THOMAS

(panicked)

But I don't have the gold coins. Or a lion! I can't ask her now.

NELSON

Okay.

THOMAS

Okay? Really?

NELSON

Of course!

(smiles)

But if you won't ask her, I will.

(calls out)

Hey, Green Bean!

THOMAS

No! Wait!

(GREEN crosses to NELSON and smiles.)

GREEN

Hi, Nelson. What's up?

NELSON

You wanna go to prom with me?

GREEN

Sure! Sounds like fun.

NELSON

Great.

(GREEN smiles and exits. NELSON turns to THOMAS.)

And that's how it's done.

THOMAS

But I was going to ask her! You stole my prom date!

(NELSON smiles and shrugs as an OFFICIAL'S VOICE is suddenly heard over a loudspeaker or bullhorn. Or perhaps OFFICIAL enters and stands off to one side.)

OFFICIAL

Final call for the pole vault. That's final call for the pole vault. All competitors to the mat.

NELSON

(grabs the pole from THOMAS)

Don't mind if I do.

(NELSON strolls offstage with the pole, leaving an incredulous THOMAS behind as lights fade.)

End of Excerpt.

To read the rest of this play, email tracywellsplaywright@gmail.com