

Chapter 1

BEST FRIENDS

You have Miss Scalf for English. Right?” Marcus’s voice crackled a bit over Chad’s earbud.

“Yeah, you do too. Right?” Chad turned the steering wheel into Marcus’s tract.

The best friends were going to see each other in a few minutes. But they both saw no reason why they shouldn’t be talking on the phone now. One of their favorite ’80s songs, Journey’s “Only the Young,” was playing in the car through Chad’s iPod. They often worked out to this song.

They first heard it in the movie *Vision Quest*. It was a wrestling movie, one of their favorites.

“Dude, I’m almost there. Don’t make me wait,” Chad said. He disconnected the call and cranked the music.

Chad Erickson and Marcus Pagel had been best friends since kindergarten. Today was the first day of their senior year. They had worked their entire lives for this moment. It was going to be the best year yet.

It had to be.

In nine months they were going to graduate. Marcus was headed to a four-year college. He didn’t know where he was going yet: Stanford, UCLA, Washington. But wherever he went, he was going to wrestle. Chad wanted to go to a four-year school too. He had applied to Stanford and a few others. But he didn’t think he would get in.

“I’m going to college,” he would tell his girlfriend, Maria. “But I might have to go to a community college first.”

There was still an outside chance that a scout from one of the Pac-12 colleges would see him. He’d be impressed with Chad. Scoop him up. Give him a full scholarship. Then Chad would wrestle for that school. And win.

That was Chad’s dream since his sophomore year. But so far, it hadn’t happened. Chad’s parents didn’t have a lot of money. Neither did Marcus’s. Chad knew going to a four-year school right out of high school would be too expensive. Marcus didn’t seem to care about the money.

He pulled up outside of Marcus’s two-story home. Chad had practically grown up here. He was another son. Just one of the family. He could help himself to their food, or get himself a drink. Nobody would blink. Not even Marcus’s little brother, Dave.

Chad sat there for a second. He thought about turning off his car and going inside.

But he didn't. Instead, he pressed a couple of buttons on his iPod and replayed "Only the Young" from the beginning. This way Marcus could listen to it too.

They weren't late. Yet. But if he went inside, Marcus would no doubt try to show him some YouTube video that Marcus and Dave found hilarious. Chad was an only child. He envied the relationship that Marcus had with his brother. Dave was a cool kid for an eighth grader. And he idolized Chad and Marcus.

"I'm gonna wrestle when I get to high school," Dave would say. "Just like you guys."

Suddenly, the red door to the Pagel house flew open. Marcus bounded outside. He had his backpack slung over his shoulder, a huge smile on his face. He was