

Chasing My Angel (Book I 1)

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Chasing My Angel

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Fiction

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Chasing My Angel

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Dedication:

To my friend Kurt, I will always treasure the memories of our youth. I have always valued our friendship and I am happy that you are still in my life.

To Clara Mash, you are my cover artist extraordinaire. You have been with me since the second book and, hopefully, I can count on you for many more.

Finally, to my wonderful husband Peter, who made it possible for us to write as a fifteen-year-old boy finding love for the first time in his life. This book was his idea. He made so many contributions to the story that I included his name as a co-author. (Don't tell him that his name appears in print much smaller than mine does.) Sometimes he still reminds me of a fifteen-year-old boy, but that's another story.

Chasing My Angel

Cassie and I walked down the alley behind our houses as we've done since we were four. We live next door to one another and are best friends. We have attended the same schools and for the most part, we are in the same classes together. More than eleven years together, and we know

each other well.

In the last few years, I've finally gotten as tall as Cassie has. She's been taller than I've been most of our lives. She never gave me grief about my height when we were younger, because most of the other boys we knew were shorter than her too.

"Thanks for making me look good with that last catch," I said. We'd spent the day playing football with some of the other neighborhood kids, as we've done most days this summer. Sometimes we have enough to play three on three, and sometimes we play two on two. We seldom had more than six kids around for a game. At fifteen, she and I were the oldest of the kids playing this summer. The group changes ever year; the older ones leave to get summer jobs and a few younger kids show up to join us.

"I knew you were in trouble when you slipped after the snap. You always look left when you're in trouble. I just headed that way before you even threw the ball. No big deal." Cassie never let pressure get to her, not in school and not in sports.

"We won because you were there, no other reason," I said. She is more competitive than I am. But when we get behind in a game, I can be competitive too. We tend to think alike most of the time.

"I love beating teams that automatically think we'll lose because there's a girl on our team," she said.

"You usually prove them wrong," I said as we neared my house.

"So, have you seen anything of our new neighbors yet?" Cassie asked. After the house on the other side of mine sold over the summer, she and I had been hoping to find out what the new people were like before school started next week. So far, all we'd seen around the place were workmen fixing up things and painting. The new owners added a big patio in the back yard and we hoped they might add a pool too. We'd had no luck with that so far. A pool would be so nice next summer.

"This is the first time we've walked past the house that there aren't any men working on something. Do you think they might be finished with the repairs?" she asked.

"If they're finished, we'll get to see who's moving in soon," I said. Just as I said this, I saw a beautiful girl walking into the house from the newly built deck. She wore a black bikini and had long dark hair. I couldn't see her face.

"Hey, watch it Eddie," Cassie said as I bumped into her. She followed my gaze and saw the girl too.

"Jeez, is she our new neighbor?" she asked.

"I sure hope so," I said.

Cassie continued walking down the alley. I'd stopped walking after I bumped into her. I just stood there, watching that girl walk into the house. My mouth might have been hanging open, I didn't notice.

"Earth to Eddie, is anybody home?" Cassie came back for me.

The girl was gone, my mind cleared and I looked around. Cassie stood two feet from me; her eyes told me she was annoyed. I'm not sure how long I'd been standing there.

"What?" I asked her

"You're being rude."

"No I'm not," I said. Cassie wasn't one to argue. She walked up to me, grabbed my T-shirt, and hauled me down the alley towards our houses.

"Who's being rude now?" I asked, as Cassie dragged me towards my house. I pushed her hand away from me and we both stopped walking again.

"You were looking at that girl like some kind of stalker. If I hadn't pulled you down the alley, you'd still be standing there slobbering."

"I wasn't stalking or slobbering. Why do you always blow things out of proportion? I just looked at her for a second."

"I'm going home. You can do what you like for the rest of the evening." And with that, she turned and walked away. "And don't look back over there again."

"I wasn't looking back there," I said after I turned my head away from the new neighbor's house.

Chapter 2

The back entrance of my house used to be the back porch, but my dad converted the space into a laundry room five years ago. Mom said I tracked too much dirt in and she wanted a place where I could take off my dirty clothes before I came into the house. This system worked well according to Mom. I threw all my clothes except my underpants into the washer and headed through the living room towards the stairs and a shower.

"That sounds like him now," I heard my mom say as I approached. "You're going to like our son."

I should have stopped before I walked into the living room in my not so tidy whites, I just wasn't quick enough. As I walked into the room, a man and woman stood up from the sofa. Both looked at me and then looked away quickly.

"Mom, what the hell..." I said and sprinted across the room towards the stairs and safety.

"Oh my, I forgot you were out playing football. I'm so sorry," my mom shouted after me. It sounded to me like she said that last part more to the strangers in our living room than to me. I took the stairs two at a time until I reached the second floor.

"That's quite all right; he had no way of knowing we were here. We're sorry for all this," a strange voice said to my mother as I went up the stairs.

I went straight into the bathroom and locked the door. I knew Mom would be up here soon and I didn't want to see her now after this mess. Sure enough, she knocked on the door in less than a minute.

"I'm sorry Eddie, I didn't even think about you leaving your clothes in the machine." She was the one who pushed for the machine to be there for me years ago so how could she forget.

"Go away!" I growled. I didn't look in the mirror, but I'm sure my face was red.

"You need to take a quick shower and come down and meet Mr. and Mrs. Yamato. They're our new neighbors. They say they have a daughter your age. Won't that be nice? You and Cassie will have someone else to play with." My mother sounded perky and happy that we'd have a new little friend to play with, as if Cassie and I were still six years old.

Damn! Damn! Damn! The parents of the girl I'd just seen, the most beautiful girl I've ever seen from the back, were sitting in my house. And they got to see me mostly naked.

"Please go away," I said. If I let Mom know what was really going on, she'd get bossy. I had to stay up here until the new people left.

"Hurry up. The Yamatos can't wait all day to meet you," Mom said, with her best let's be friend's voice. I knew there was no getting out of this. Why is it mothers get to tell you what to do all the time, it seems like I should have a vote on things too, like meeting new people.

"I'll be down after I get cleaned up," I said. This might be the longest shower I've ever taken, but I would eventually make it downstairs.

"You've got ten minutes. Don't even think about taking longer."

Her tone of voice had quickly changed back to Mom the boss. If I didn't want to get into trouble, I needed to get going. I started the shower and adjusted the temperature.

"I'll be down in ten minutes," I said through the door. I couldn't tell if she heard me or if she'd left already.

When I finished my shower nine minutes later, I ran to my room, found clean shorts and took a shirt off a hanger. I never knew exactly what clothes went with what, so I stuck to solid colors

whenever possible.

As I walked slowly down the stairs, I heard my mom say, "I'm sorry you can't stay any longer, I so wanted you both to meet Eddie. He's a wonderful boy."

"We will have other chances to meet him, but we must get home."

Crap! If they left before I put in an appearance, Mom would be all over me for a week. I ran across the living room to get there before they left. I said, "Hi, I'm Eddie. Sorry about before."

Both of these strangers did something odd, at least to my way of thinking. They each took a step away from Mom where they were standing by our front door and bowed to me, kind of solemnly. I'd only seen this kind of thing in the movies before today. I didn't know what I should do, so I bowed back towards them. They both smiled at me. I smiled back; hey, this was going pretty well so far.

"We are sorry for intruding in your home. It has been our pleasure to meet you and your mother. Soon we shall have your family as our guests for dinner. Thank you for everything today." They gave me another small bow and walked out the door.

I stood there staring at the door for a second. Mom came over to me and gave me a hug. "What's that for?" I asked as I tried to get away.

"Because you look so nice and you made a good second impression with the new neighbors," she said as she looked at me with her 'proud mom' face. I'd seen that look a few times in the past and always felt good when I could do that for her.

"The phone rang while you were in the shower. Cassie said to tell you that she would stop by around seven o'clock to see you," Mom said as she headed towards the kitchen to start supper. I wondered if Cassie wanted to talk about the new neighbors.

Mom drafted me to set the table and pour iced tea for supper. I went along to keep that winning streak going until Dad came home. It was always good to have Mom on my side when Dad came home, because we were never sure if he would be in a bad mood or not.

Chapter 3

My dad always comes home on time most of the year. The only part of the year when we never knew when he'd be home is tax season, between January 2nd and April 15th. During tax season, we don't know what to expect, so Mom and I sometimes eat supper without him. My dad is a CPA and he likes things very well organized.

Tonight we are having meatloaf; we have this every other Tuesday, Dad's orders. Mom is a good cook; at least most of what she fixes is okay. She could probably do other kinds of cooking, but Dad is a "meat and potatoes guy." Tonight, he came home in a good mood and went into the living room until supper was ready.

When Mom called us for supper, Dad was watching the five o'clock news. "They sure are making a big deal about the new car plant," he said as he sat down at the table. Our house had a big dining room, but we mostly eat in the little room off the kitchen. Mom likes to call it the breakfast nook.

"Speaking of the new plant, our new neighbors moved in today and he's going to work there," Mom said as she put the mashed potatoes on the table.

"How do you know that?" Dad asked.

"They came over today and introduced themselves, they're very nice." Mom didn't say anything more about them and I thought she was waiting for me to join the conversation.

"They're Japanese," I said.

"What did you say?" Dad asked. He was about to put a spoonful of corn in his mouth, but lowered the spoon back to his plate instead.

"Eddie said that the new neighbors are Japanese, but they came from California. Mr. Yamato is some kind of engineer and will be working on things until the plant is finished. Then he'll stay and help them build cars," Mom said.

"I've said this all along, a car company from Japan won't hire American workers; they'll bring in their own people for this new plant. When the mayor was going around saying what a boon this would be for Marysville, nobody listened to me. And now it's started, even before the plant is even finished."

"John, you need to accept the fact that the plant is going to be finished soon and that our little town is growing. Won't that be good for your firm; you are a partner after all?"

"You're right about the growth, it's happening all over. We have a new this and a new that all

around town, it's too much too soon," my father said. He had stopped eating and I started to worry that he might start a fight with Mom. My parents got along most of the time, but the changes in town upset Dad and sometimes he didn't act very nicely to Mom.

"Why don't you finish eating before it gets cold," my mom said. She gave him a warm smile and he settled down. Dad was usually quiet about things; I don't think he wants trouble most of the time. He likes being an accountant because he doesn't have to deal with people for a big part of his job. As a partner, he assigns staff accountants to deal with clients; that's what he says anyway.

Mom looked at me after Dad had gotten back into his rhythm of eating, her eyes said to keep my mouth shut for the rest of the meal. I figured out that her pause earlier wasn't to let me into the conversation; rather, she just hadn't wanted to bring up the new neighbor's nationality right away. I like meatloaf, so I got to work on mine without another word.

Mom poured wine for herself and Dad, we had apple pie for dessert and the rest of supper went smoothly. Dad didn't say much else during the meal and seemed content with his pie and wine.

"May I be excused; Cassie is coming over in a little while?" I asked.

"Why don't you help your mother with the dishes?" my father said.

My first reaction was to say something, but I thought better of it since Dad hadn't been in the best mood fifteen minutes ago.

"I'll clear the table," I said quickly.

"Good man," Dad said as he got up and went into the living room to watch the rest of the news.

Mom had a look of relief on her face after he left. She usually could make him do what she wanted, but I could see her stress sometimes too.

"Why doesn't he like the new neighbors?" I asked quietly when I was sure he was gone.

"It's not that he doesn't like the new neighbors, your father doesn't like things to change. We came here after he got his degree from OSU, because Marysville was a sleepy little town. That's how he wanted to raise a family, in a quiet town, and now his sleepy little town has become the new home of a giant car manufacturing plant. Everything he wanted in this town will be gone soon, that what's really bothering him," Mom said as she got the dishes rinsed and sorted into the machine.

"Is he going to be upset all the time from now on?" I asked. Dad was a handful during tax season. I sure didn't want him to be like that all year long just because of some car plant.

"Your father will adjust, the same way we'll all adjust as time goes on. He will take longer than most people, but he'll be okay." Mom sounded more optimistic than I think she really was. I'd learned one sure thing in fifteen years; parents were very hard to live with at times. Cassie agreed with me on this score completely.

Chapter 4

Cassie came over a little before seven o'clock to exchange info about the new people. We usually spent part of our evenings together. During school, we studied together and in the summer, we found stuff to do or we just watched TV. We were always together and this was our life.

"So, what did you think of them?" she asked as she sat down on the front porch with me.

"I saw them for two seconds. I said hello, they bowed and said they were sorry for this afternoon and left."

"What happened this afternoon, did you do something stupid?"

"No, I just ran across the living room in my underwear."

She cracked up about that. "Why would you do that when you had guests? You can be such a jerk sometimes."

"It's not like I knew we had company. When I came home I threw my dirty clothes in the washing

machine and there they were when I left the back room. I got no warning from Mom and I had no place to hide. Stop laughing, what would you have done?"

"For one thing, I don't change out of my dirty clothes on the back porch. And I look good in my underwear."

"You wish." I'd seen her in a bathing suit and I didn't think she was anything exceptional.

She glared at me for a second, but let it go. She said, "My mom said they're Japanese, is she right?"

"I guess, I can't tell the difference between Japanese and Chinese or anybody else from that part of the world. Can you?"

"No, but I didn't see them. I don't think I've ever seen real oriental people up close. They were gone before I got home," Cassie said, as if seeing them in person would help her tell where they came from.

"Mom said they're from California, not from Japan. He moved here to take a job at that new car plant. He might already work for the car company, I didn't hear about their past."

"Really, I suppose it make sense to have Japanese people working there if they're going to build Japanese cars, right?" Cassie asked.

"Is a car still Japanese if it's built in this country?" I'd never thought about that before.

"Is that what they call a hybrid?" Cassie asked. I couldn't tell if she was joking or really didn't know.

"No, jeez you really don't know anything sometimes. Hybrids run on electrical power," I said.

"I don't know anything. Is that what you said? Is that why I was number three in our class last year while you were what, twenty-sixth?"

"Twenty-first," I said, trying to defend my honor.

"Whatever, did your mom learn anything else about them?" Cassie asked. New neighbors were kind of a big deal around here. The Nelsons had lived there forever. Mom said they were already there when she and Dad bought our house just after I was born.

"The only other thing she told me was they have a girl our age," Cassie said.

"I hear she's going to start at our school when the new school year begins next week. It's hard to believe the girl we saw at their house is our age. She looked eighteen, at least from the back, but my mom said the same thing about her," I said. My mind drifted back to the image of the girl in the black bikini walking away from us this afternoon.

"Why do you have that silly grin on your face? Do you like her? If she's really in our grade, you won't have a chance with her. All the junior and senior boys will chase her until she picks one of them, and he'll probably have a nice car."

"I never said I liked her. She may have a face like a boxer."

"The dog or the fighter?" Cassie asked, trying to be funny and failing.

"Gosh, look at that, it's time for you to go home already. Sorry to see you go tonight," I said. Cassie is my best friend; I expected a little support from her on things like this. Besides, I'd never had a girlfriend anyway. I have a girl with me almost the whole time I'm awake every day, I've never thought about a girlfriend before. But this new girl made me think of other things.

"Don't get all hurt and pouty. I'm just telling you the truth. She has lots of long hair and curves. She can wear a bikini. She's from California and is foreign; all that spells out of your league. Even if she has the face of a boxer or not, she'll still be too much for you. I just want you to live in the real world about this girl."

"I have an advantage over all the other guys she'll meet next week."

"And that is?"

"I live next door to her."

Cassie started laughing. "That is so not a big deal. Some six foot two inch jock driving a new Camaro will crush your advantage so fast your head will spin."

"We'll see," I said, but she might have a point about the car. I needed a car as soon as I turned sixteen. Mom and Dad haven't said a word about a car yet, but I was hoping they might buy me something nice for my birthday. There wasn't much I could do about the car problem, so I switched gears.

"Let's go to the library in the morning," I said.

"Are you going to look up things about Japan?" This was the problem of living with someone next door that you see every day; she always knew what I was thinking.

"What's wrong with that? Do you want to come with me or not?" I asked.

"I guess I'll come too, but I'm not helping you with research just so you can look smart for that girl, got it?"

"I got it, but why not? I thought you were my best friend?" I didn't understand why she wasn't going to help me. We always did everything together and she had always helped me when things were important, and this was important to me.

"Jeez, okay, I'll help you. But don't be surprised when she rejects you like the plague. I'm trying to save you from all that pain." She said it with a smirk on her face and I knew she would shoot me down given the chance. Girls are a handful.

In the morning, we both got our bikes out and left for the library at eight-thirty so we could be there when it opened at nine. When we arrived, we parked our bikes and locked them up just in time to go in with all the old people waiting by the doors for the librarian to unlock them. Marysville has one big main library and two little branches out in the sticks.

"Have we ever been here this early in the morning?" I asked.

"I don't think so, but you've never been in love before," she said with a big grin. I gave her a push.

"I'm not in love, so quit being a jerk."

"It's funny to see you like this. I've never seen you run to the library to do research before today that wasn't an important assignment."

"I'm going to look in the encyclopedias," I said. "Would you look through the card catalog for any books we could take home?"

"Do you have your library card?" she asked.

"I've got it," I said. I wouldn't have remembered it if Mom hadn't said something about it last night when I told her we were coming here today.

I went over to the research section and pulled the J books of two different encyclopedias. I went to a desk, opened them up, and found Japan and started to read. The next thing I know, Cassie is sitting next to me with a stack of books in front of her.

"What are all these? I asked.

"These are all the books I found for you about Japan and California. There is a history book about when many of the Japanese came to this country around nineteen-hundred and what those people went through. I looked at that one and it's interesting. There's a book on their clothes and food and one on their history; did you know that the country of Japan has been around for hundreds of years longer than our country?"

She sat there with a very satisfied look on her face. "You found all these books already and had time to read sections in them too? How can you be so fast?" I asked.

"So fast, it's almost ten-thirty. We've been here for way more than the hour you said we'd stay already." Cassie looked at me as if I'd fallen asleep.

I couldn't believe it; the time had gone by so quickly. "I've been having fun reading about their country. They are kind of an amazing country."

"Tell me about it later, you need to pick out which of these books you want to take home because I'd like to go soon," she said. I couldn't blame her; she looked bored now that she had all these books picked out for me.

"Do you want to go home without me?"

"No, I just want you to get what you came for and then we can both go. It isn't like we have a

paper to write, I'm not interested in any of this stuff."

"All right," I said as I closed the book that I'd been reading. "I'll take the ones you think would be the best ones, how's that?"

Cassie brightened up; she took five of the books from the pile and handed them to me. "Go check out while I put the rest of these back. I'll meet you outside," she said as she scooped up the other books and headed back down the aisle. I took the books and went to the front desk to check out.

The girl at the front desk looked at the titles of each book before she signed them out. When she had everything done for me, she said, "You got a paper due the first day of school or something?"

"No, I just have an interest, that's all."

"Because of the new car plant?"

"Yeah, I guess so." I just wanted my books, not a big discussion about them.

"Good luck, Mr. Japan man," she said, and turned to help someone else.

When I got out to the bike rack, Cassie was waiting. "Took you long enough," she said as she got on her bike. Our parents had gotten us bikes for our tenth birthdays, both Schwinn's and both the same models. Mine was kind of beat up now, but hers still looked brand new.

"The girl checking out books took forever and then she called me Mr. Japan man when I left. What's up with that?"

"You're probably the only person to check out so many books at the same time about Japan. She's just teasing you is all. Let's go home and change clothes and see if anybody is at the football field," Cassie said as she took off.

Playing football didn't sound as fun today as it had sounded yesterday, but I peddled hard to catch up anyway. We changed into old clothes and met in front of my house, then headed over to the football field.

Nobody was around by the time we got there. We rode our bikes over today since we were so late, but with nobody there, we just went back home. I noticed Cassie took the street in front of our houses to the field and coming home. We seldom ride on the street if we have an alley to ride down; I wondered about this after I got home.

"I'm going to go read," I said as we neared my house.

"See you after supper," Cassie said as she rode on.

"How about I see you tomorrow?" I shouted to her back.

She waved and I didn't know if she heard me or not. I went into the house and right up to my room. I couldn't remember a time when I looked forward to reading as much as I did now. I dove into the first book; it was about the internment of the Japanese during World War II. I'd never heard of any of this and it seemed impossible to believe what we did to those people during the war. I read until supper time.

At supper, I asked, "Have you guys ever heard of something called the internment of World War II?"

"Of course we have," Dad said. "Why do you ask?"

"I got some books at the library today and one of them was about these prison camps that Americans who happened to be of Japanese heritage got sent to during the war. It sounds illegal," I said.

"Why are you reading about the Japanese?" my dad asked.

"I'm interested," I said as I looked at Mom for some reinforcement.

"I think it's a good idea to read up on their history, since we have Japanese neighbors now. I'm proud of your initiative Eddie," Mom said. My father seemed to have lost interest in the whole discussion already and we quickly moved on to other topics.

"I'll be in my room reading. Thanks for supper," I said as I left the table in a hurry so Dad wouldn't make me help with cleanup.

I skimmed the rest of the book about the war stuff and started a book about Samurai. The book had pictures of their swords, their armor and helmets. This book was cool to look at, but a little boring to read.

"Hey, aren't you supposed to be reading?"

I opened my eyes, jumped up in bed and fell on the floor. Cassie started laughing her head off.

"What the hell...?" I must have fallen asleep.

"I told your mom you'd be asleep when I got up here, but she said you were too interested in that book to fall asleep. I should have bet her. You're so predictable Eddie," she said after she stopped laughing.

"You could have made me break my neck, what are you doing here?" I said I'd see you tomorrow." I got myself off the bedroom floor and sat down on the bed next to Cassie.

"I didn't hear anything about tomorrow, I wouldn't have missed that scene for the world. You looked like a cat that got thrown out of a moving car," she said, and she continued to smile her big dumb smile at me.

"I was dreaming about being a Samurai and being in a sword fight right when you scared the crap out of me. Do you know that if you die in a dream, you die in real life?" I said. I was trying to regain some of my dignity.

"What's that again, I was too busy reliving the picture of you flying off the bed to hear what you said."

If this girl were any more wound up, she'd be jumping up and down on the mattress. "Why don't you just go home, I'd like to get back to my books," I said.

"Fine, fine, I'll see you tomorrow. Try to stay awake. I won't tell your mom you were sleeping when I found you, but I bet one of them heard the crash when you landed."

“Good night, Cassie,” I said as she started towards the door.

“Let’s go play football tomorrow, okay?”

I sighed. “If that will make you happy.”

“It will; good night Eddie,” she said, and left my room. I heard the back door clank shut, so I know neither of my parents stopped her on the way out. I went back to reading, this time at my desk.

"I want you to take this pie over to the new neighbors this morning," my mother said when I came downstairs for breakfast. We'd had apple pie for dessert last night and she must have made more than one. I felt kind of strange about going over there. I might get to see the face of the girl I had only seen from the back, but I might not know what to say to her when I did meet her.

"Cassie and I are going to go play football this morning," I said as I worked on my bowl of Sugar Pops.

"Don't whine, you're fifteen and whining sounds unbecoming from someone your age," she said.

"Do I have to?" I whined.

"Yes, you have to, why not take Cassie too?"

"She won't want to go," I said. When I listened to myself I did sound a little whiny, but when did I become the apple pie deliveryman?

"I'll bet she'd love to meet another girl in the neighborhood her own age. It's settled, the two of you are going to take this pie over to the Yamatos this morning." Mom left no room for further discussion. There was that tone in her voice that said not to argue anymore and I decided to go along. Cassie would be here in ten minutes and I'd let her take up the fight then. For now, I'd go watch TV.

Cassie came in the back door; she was right on time. I heard my mom talking to her for a minute and then she came into the living room.

"I hear your mom wants you to take a pie over to the new people's house, and your mom wants me to go with you and make sure you don't make a fool of yourself," Cassie said. She was standing in the doorway between the living room and the kitchen. Mom would hear every word I said so I just nodded my head in agreement. Cassie didn't look like she was dressed for visiting new neighbors either; she had cutoff jean shorts and a T-shirt along with dirty tennis shoes. I looked almost the same except I wore better shoes.

"Come on, we might as well get this over with," I said as I got up from the sofa. We walked into the kitchen and Mom handed me the foil covered pie plate.

"Tell them that I hope they like it and welcome them to the neighborhood. And Cassiopeia, let them know I drafted you and didn't give you time to go home and put on nicer clothes," Mom said. Whenever she used either of our full names, it meant she was giving an order.

"Yes ma'am," Cassie said as we started to walk out the back door. "Front door you two."

"Mom, there isn't a fence. We'll get to their front door just the same," I said. Mom just stood there and looked at me. Cassie nudged me in the back and we turned around and went out the front door.

"Don't I look all right?" Cassie asked as we walked to the neighbor's house.

"You look like you're ready to play football, how else would you look when we're going to play football?" I said. We were turning into the Yamato's driveway by then.

"Exactly," Cassie said.

I had stopped listening to her. The garage door in front of me was up and someone was kicking a punching bag, a big heavy bag that fighters use when they're training for a fight. It was dark in the garage, so it was hard to see who was in there, but whoever it was, they sure could kick. The bag hung from the rafters of the ceiling of the garage and this person was kicking the bag six or seven feet off the floor.

"Look at that," Cassie said. "Just like Bruce Lee."

She and I had seen a movie on late night TV with this Bruce Lee guy kicking the snot out of everyone. I didn't believe it was possible to do the stunts he did for the movie and I quit watching after half an hour. Cassie swore it was real and that he did all that stunt stuff by himself. Watching this person in the garage made me think Bruce might have really done all that stuff in the movie.

"Hello," Cassie yelled. The person stopped kicking and started coming our way.

"My god," I said. Walking out of the garage was the girl I'd seen a couple of days ago in the black bikini. I almost dropped the pie. Never had I seen such an amazing girl before.

"Can I help you?" she said. She was wiping sweat off her face with a small towel as she walked towards us. *

When the new neighbors move in next door, Eddie never envisioned meeting a girl his age with so much grace, and exotic beauty. Saya Yamato is about to transform Eddie's innocent, small town life in central Ohio. It is love at first sight for him. But Saya has her own agenda for life and love.

First love, however, isn't always kind, and can be confusing and painful. Eddie's heart longs for Saya. His best friend of eleven years, Cassie, the tomboy, is developing into an appealing young woman and is imagining a romantic relationship with Eddie. Saya's arrival brings unwanted complications.

Their town is changing too as it becomes home to the first Japanese car production plant in the country. Ethnic tensions rise as the city is flooded with foreigners coming to work at the plant.

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