

Chapter 1

My ball!

“Next point wins,” PJ said.

PJ and his best friend Max were playing 1-on-1 basketball in Max’s driveway. It was PJ’s ball.

PJ checked the basketball to Max. Max put a tricky smile on his face. “Think fast!” He threw the ball back hard so that it hit PJ’s legs and went out of bounds.

“My ball!” Max said.

“What?” said PJ.

“It went off you,” said Max.

“You can’t throw it at my legs.”

“It’s not my fault you can’t catch,” Max said in a mean way.

“Max, you know that’s not fair.”

“Okay. Shoot for it! If you make it, it’s your ball. If you miss, it’s my ball.”

PJ did not want to shoot for it, but he also did not want to look like a wimp. “Fine,” PJ said. PJ picked up the ball and went

to the crack in the driveway they used as the **free-throw line**. PJ **dribbled** the ball five times. He pulled the ball to his chest and shot it. **Clank**. No good.

“Brick!” Max said. Max made a face at PJ. “Whatever. Just take it.”

Max checked the ball to PJ. PJ tried to trick Max just like Max tricked him. He threw it hard at Max’s legs, but Max was ready for it and caught the ball.

Max faked to his left then went the other way. He was past PJ in a blink.

If the ball went in, PJ would lose the game. Max jumped for a lay-up. PJ jumped and swung his hand to block the shot. He missed the ball and hit Max hard in the back. Max fell down.

“**Ow!** What was that?” Max was mad.

“I was just trying to block you,” PJ said.

“You pushed me!”

PJ made his voice sound like Max’s. “It’s not my fault you can’t make a **lay-up**.”

Max got in PJ’s face and bumped him with his chest.

“Back up!” PJ pushed Max.

Max pushed PJ hard in the chest with both hands. PJ fell back with a thud on the driveway. PJ felt his anger rise. It came up from his chest to his face. It was like lava from a volcano. He could not stop the words.

“I HATE YOU!” PJ’s eyes had tears in them. He did not want Max to see him cry. He picked up his ball and started to go back home.

From a few houses away, he heard Max yell, “I am not your friend anymore!”

PJ bolted into his house and ran to his room. He wished he would never ever have to see Max again. Deep down, he knew this wish would not come true.