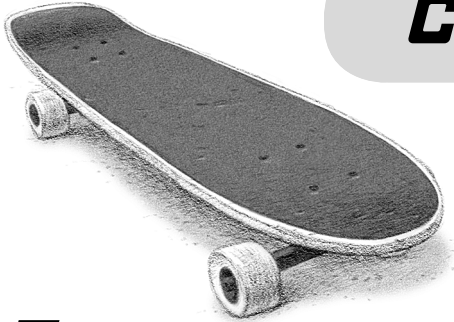


CHAPTER 1



The wheels of the skateboard made a rumbling hum as they rolled over the pavement at the little town park. I loved that sound. The world rushed by me as I zipped across the blacktop. I could feel how smooth or rough it was right through my sneakers, and it was like I was watching the park in fast-forward. The greens and browns of the grass and trees flashed by on the sides as I kept my eyes on the little concrete path in front of me, looking for the next good, flat spot. I was trying to get this one trick down, but the board wasn't cooperating. It slipped out from under me again and went bouncing across the ground.

That had been happening to me a lot lately, and I knew why. I'd had a big growth spurt this year. We're talking, like, my pants from before looked like shorts on me now. I was definitely the tallest eleven-year-old in my neighborhood, and it could be pretty tough to keep all my long limbs going in the same direction as those four little wheels. Put it this way: When I bent down to pick up the board, I had to bend a long way.

I was trying to do an ollie. What you do is pop the board into the air while you're riding it. If you do it right, it's like you're jumping with the board glued to your feet — pretty cool. I was still only doing it right about half the time, so I stayed on the path and worked on it a little longer.

My jumps were getting a little higher, and I decided to head for a bigger stretch of pavement to work on them.

"Ay-yo!" I heard as I turned a corner. I thought I might be in trouble, but when I looked up, I could see it was just the opposite. It was my friend Mike. He was on the park's old basketball court with our friend Deuce.

"What's up?" I called. This was our local court, and the three of us had spent whole days playing here together.