

CHIP ERIKSON

HIM

May (the earlier part)

He's dying. He hasn't told me this, but it doesn't matter. *I know*. He's in bed with a sheet wrapped around his head and jaw. Like Curly with a toothache.

"I can't move."

him

We're drinking White Zinfandel and taking some of the pain pills his doctor gave him. I tilt the plastic cup back to his lips and he swallows. *He really can't move.*

Long, long before (in fact, it might not've happened)

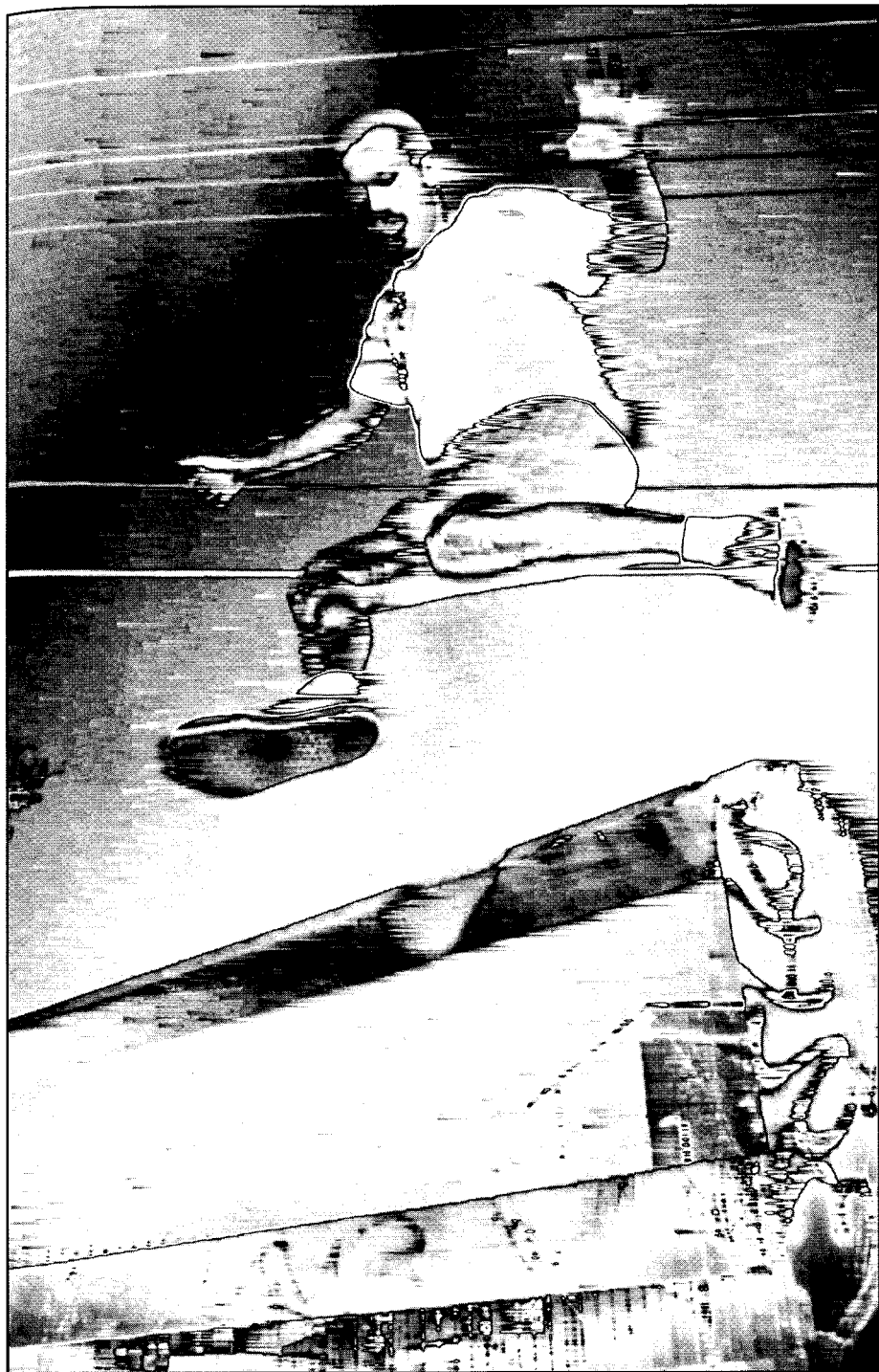
The speed is incredible. Not the *sense* of speed but the actual speed. Thirteen year old boys sometimes reach 50 miles-per-hour when they're running downhill. I swear to God.

"My feet aren't touching the ground!"

him

I'm laughing so hard I can't answer. When you're moving this fast, you can't help it. It's funny.

There are bigger, angry kids right behind us. On bikes. But they won't catch us. The field is right in front of us, and they'll have to get off their bikes to



follow us in.

We reach the low fence around the field and leap it like hurdlers.

Stop
In midair

It's this moment that I'll never forget:

We're in the air, and nobody, not even bigger kids who just got hit by water balloons can catch us. We're in perfect synch, we've jumped this fence so many times before, and we know exactly where we'll land, and exactly where we'll run to after we land. In this moment, we are Gods. We could've hovered over the fence if we wanted to.

5 years later

We're in my mother's Chevrolet Caprice at the drive-in, drinking Mickey's Big Mouths and eating those shitty hot dogs they sell. Sometimes we fart and the vinyl seat makes them vibrate. This still makes me laugh.

I don't know how it came up. The loops and tangents a conversation follows are impossible to remember, but the bigger points tend to stay with you.

"I think I like guys."

him

I wanted to tell him I already knew, but I could tell he wanted to *tell* me. So I made myself look surprised.

"Not *you*, you know, but
other guys. I think about
what it would feel like to
sleep with a man."

him

And that was it. We talked a few more minutes about it, then I farted and we laughed for a while. We stayed for both movies.

6 years later

We're 24. Both pursuing jobs in the *entertainment* industry. He's an actor and I'm a writer, although I can't remember having written anything.

The guy who takes tickets at the Nuart looks at us suspiciously. Were we the ones who left beer bottles under the seats last week? He gives us our change and we walk past, the bottles clinking quietly under our coats.

I ask him about his surfer-guy.

He laughs. When he laughs there's a low rattle in his lungs, like he's getting over a cold.

"Why can't you ever call him Ken?"

him

I tell him because he doesn't look like a Ken, he looks like a surfer-guy. I ask him what his parents think, and we both start laughing. Quietly at first, then we're hysterical. Tears are streaming down his face as he manages a quick sentence:

"They're happy that I've finally
found a nice Jewish girl."

him

We fall off our seats, trying to clutch our cokes.

We've never laughed so hard in our lives. The manager comes down and kicks us out.

May

I'm working on a *project* and I haven't called him for a while. I go to his restaurant. It pisses him off when I order cappuccinos, because he has to make them. So I order them whenever possible.

He's not there. Hasn't been for two weeks I'm told. Tell him to get well, we need him back.

Before that (March, I think)

He finds out that one of his friends is dying. I get right to the point: *did you sleep with this guy?* He doesn't answer, and suddenly I want to cry. I'm pissed off and angry, because my best friend has no right to risk his life without consulting *me first*.

"I'm not getting tested. They
say that stress only makes it
worse, and if I knew I had it
I'd be a mess."

him

He coughs again and I want to grab him by his shirt and take him to the hospital, because *I know* that when we're together, in synch, we can beat *anything*.

But I didn't. Amazingly, there are certain boundaries of respect you never want to cross.

Some Night in May (after we drank wine together)

He called me in the middle of the night.

"I'm sweating all over the place."
him

I asked him if he wanted me to come over.

"No. You'd bring wine or beer
and we'd get drunk and I *know*
I'd get sick."

him

We talked about nothing for a while, then he simply told me. Like he was telling me the Laker's score. The weirdest thing: he sounded *relieved*.

The Terrible Events In June

This disease carries so much fucking baggage with it. It's not enough that

you're dying, but you're marked: *He's got the plague, the fag-plague, the drug-user plague, he's EVIL! I'll bet he's had sex with black people and monkeys! The green ones from Africa!*

His parents are *religious*. You know, the religion where you're supposed to love even your worst enemy? They won't come to see him. They are shocked that he's gay.

"It's a sin, and I'm sorry. He's
my son and I love him very much,
but he shouldn't have been involved
in that lifestyle."

his mother

I'm on the phone with her for over an hour. I've already thrown my favorite mug against the wall and hit my refrigerator door with my fist. I think someone in my building has called the cops.

She won't budge. Her husband feels the same way. In fact, *he's ashamed*. Not quite sure if he should tell the relatives. WHAT'S THE FUCKING DIFFERENCE WHAT YOUR SON IS DYING OF?! I try to pose this as politely as possible.

"I'm sorry, you're very angry.
You've made me upset again. I'm
hanging up."

his mother

Then there's *a lot* of glass breaking. I pull out my shelves and throw them into my den, hitting my TV. This isn't something I've carefully thought out, so I unintentionally break *all* my dishes. I think about UPS-ing the broken glass to his parents.

The House

I can't write or say that other word anymore. The one that starts out like *hospital*. I just can't do it. Anyway, that's where I go. I'm pissed because the air conditioner in my car doesn't work and I'm sweating like a dog.

I've brought him the new Sam Kinison. There's some stuff on it that'll make

him laugh. He loves jokes about homosexuals, particularly Kinison's.

I park outside the house. It's a nice place on the southern border of Hancock Park. I'm going to come here every single day if I can.

We're going to switch tenses, because I'd like this next bit to remain in the past. There's a man outside the house, a neighbor, I was told later. He carried a sign, like he was on strike. I don't remember what it said, but it was angrily worded and said he didn't want *this ... house* in his neighborhood. *Children play in front of this house for Godsakes!*

I walked toward the house and tried not to look at the man or his sign. He was a big guy though, and he was hard *not* to look at. I could tell he wanted to get in my way, but was reluctant to do so in case I was one of "them." Instead, he mumbled something under his breath. It sounded like "dirty faggot." I bit my lip. I told myself I wasn't going to get involved in the politics of this thing, it would take too much energy out of me. Energy I could spend taking care of my best friend. He said it again, but added something *very* derogatory this time. Something he hoped would happen to all gay people. I'm not gay, but it hit me as strongly as if I was.

Then he's sitting on the grass and his nose is turned to the side. He's put his hands on his face and he's trying to scream through the blood: *I'm calling the cops, I'm calling the cops!* I hoped he would, maybe they'd take his sign away.

The last part

He died. I know this sounds like a movie, but I was there. I was holding his hand. Caressing it, like his mother should've been. I knew he was gone, but I kept wiping my tears off his face anyway.

He said something about his mother before he died, but I can't remember what it was. She came to the funeral and I told her that he wanted me to tell her that he loved her. I was hoping this would make her cry, but didn't stick around to find out.

Later, dusk

I'm running. I'm still wearing my suit, but I took off my dress shoes. My feet are tough and I'm sprinting on the pavement, trying to reach 50. There's a

gate by my house, and I zero in on it ...

This is somebody else's house, but I don't give a fuck. I'm so mad, I'm like a lunatic, a train gone out of control, and nobody better get in my way —

I'm yards away from the gate, and suddenly the big kids are behind us again, on bikes, but *we're* faster — I plant my foot far away, *I've really gotta get some air to clear this thing ...*

Jumping
higher

higher
together, again, in midair
we both have wings
and for a split-second
(that tiny fraction of time that actually lasts a lifetime)
we're thirteen again,
and nothing else matters.