

1.

Jake judged the distance to be about twelve feet. A pretty good jump but not exciting enough. Better move the ramp.

He grabbed the piece of plywood and dragged it backwards, pulling it off the milk crates. The edge came off the top of the cracked, plastic crates and landed “THUMP!” on the dry, sunbaked Oklahoma dirt.

It hadn't rained in a month. In just a few weeks the ground had gone from a smooth, perfect driveway up to his parent's double-wide trailer to a rippled, bumpy scabble to, finally, a cratered moonscape. Jake was getting pretty good at peeling out on it with his BMX monster bike. Before only bits of rock would fly but now he could send up a decent dust cloud.

The thump of the plywood sent up a pretty good dust cloud too. Enough to make Johnny, who was lying in the middle, between the two ramps, take a risk and open his eyes. He watched the ramp being slowly dragged away.

“What are you doing?” Getting no answer, he sat up. “I was all ready,” he yelled at the retreating Jake, dragging the plywood sheet across the driveway.

“Jump's not big enough.”

Johnny stood up, blinking away the blowing dust storm his friend created.

“Whaddya' mean? It's, like, twenty feet or something!”

“Ten. Maybe twelve feet. Not far enough.”

Johnny sighed, got up, and moved to align himself with the new “middle.” Jake did this on big stunts. Chicken out without saying he was afraid. He came up with the best ideas! But then he'd find ways to make them “better”, then get interrupted (or change his mind again), and eventually call it off.

“Why don’t you let me do the jump this time?” Johnny begged.

“Nope. Bike’s too big for you.”

Johnny was nine-years old. Jake was ten. The bike was a monster bike, Johnny knew. But was it ONE YEAR too big? No, it wasn’t.

“I’ll go get my bike then!”

He’d tried that trick before. For every stunt or trick that Jake would wimp out on, Johnny would gladly hop on his own, more normal, hand-me-down bike. But Jake would always give the same “Your bike can’t out-jump the Monster” response.

“The Monster.” Yeah, right. Johnny had jumped plenty of times at home and didn’t have any trouble! Jake’s bike was cool. He had put together so many parts from other bikes Johnny couldn’t even tell what kind it had originally been. Then he painted it bright orange and dubbed it “The Monster.”

Why orange? It was the only paint he found at the junkyard that was free. Plus, it was the school color. So it was free and cool at the same time. Johnny’s bike was green. And not a cool green like camouflage or something. It was green like his grandmother’s refrigerator, which made it definitely not cool at all. Johnny wasn’t sure if Jake thought his bike couldn’t make the jumps because it was too small or too green. He suspected it was because it was too green.

So Johnny gave up. It would be fine. As long as Jake actually made the jump.

Jake set up the milk crates in the new spot and set up the plywood back on top. The ramp had also been a sore spot between them. Johnny, who was going to be lying down in between the ramps, wanted the angle steeper. But Jake thought if it was lower he could keep his speed up better. Johnny knew Jake liked to go fast but he also thought the jump should be as high as

possible. The idea of “The Monster” racing across his stomach didn’t sound like too much fun. And it wasn’t worth the two packs of gum Jake offered. Big League Chew, but still...

The ramp set up, Johnny back on the ground, dead center, and Jake suiting up.

They had both studied the big stunts from their favorite TV shows and movies. They knew safety was important. Jake had one half of an old baseball catcher’s uniform on - also: shin guards, elbow pads, and two ratty old knee pads stolen from the roller-skating rink - and Johnny had the other half: the catcher’s mask on his face and the catcher’s mitt on his pants. In an important spot. And he also had on a pair of wristbands. Not because they protected him at all. They just looked cool. Jake also said they could mop up blood real well.

Now all that was left was the countdown. And then the actual jump. They had only gotten that far twice before. Johnny still had the scar from the last time.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven...”

Jake pulled down his goggles and adjusted them over his eyes. He never wore a helmet because it was an old motorcycle helmet and covered his ears - he couldn’t hear as well with it on.

“...five, four, three...”

Feet on the leading pedal, poised to peel out. Johnny adjusted that important catcher’s mitt one more time.

“...two...”

“JACOB WILLIAM ADDISON! What in heaven do you think you are doing??!” screamed a mother’s voice, punctuated by the squeak of the trailer screen door flying open.

Looked like today’s stunt was scrubbed.