

AUSTIN NIGHTS

By
herocious .

SMASHWORDS EDITION

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herocious .

Austin Nights
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Adult Reading Material

{ for bridget }

AUSTIN NIGHTS

3.

Today is April 1st, and I just finished recording a 4:01 video to celebrate the moment. Bridget is driving the white Silverado packed to the hilt with the stuff we couldn't do without: our home.

We're driving a long way. Miami Beach was death defying, but we have to leave now, leave the giant ocean with its therapeutic sands and salts for no less than five years.

Austin will be our new stomping ground. We're driving there as I write. Bridget has both hands on the wheel. Sometimes there's a large iced latte between her legs.

I find the mixture of caffeine and inner thighs more stimulating than just caffeine. Goosebumps from the iciness of her refreshment riddle her flesh. I reach over and grab the cup without asking for a sip. She doesn't make a sarcastic remark.

"Thanks," I say, lingering when I put the iced latte back between her legs.

She raises her eyebrows high above her Tri-Rail sunglasses and says, "Good, isn't it?"

"Very."

I slide her iPhone into the passenger door pocket and look at the familiar I-95 North scenery. Nothing has changed really, not in the four years I've lived in South Florida at least.

"What a beautiful day," says Bridget, her window rolled down.

The highway and air sound loud outside. She has to shout everything to be heard. But if we roll the windows up and crank the AC, mpg in the Chevy plummets from 20 to a little less than fifteen, and we're on a budget.

Off in the distance, a train speaks in Austin. I listen to the whistle and wonder where it's going. If it has a long way yet or if it has already arrived.

We're exploring the South Lamar area on our way to Half-Price Books. We walk over railroad tracks as the whistle blows again. It sounds closer. Will we see the train?

I think I can speak for both of us when I say we're feeling full of life these days.

Suddenly, I fancy walking along these railroad tracks.

Dear Lord, where would we be without the railroad?

I say to Bridget, "We need to walk along these tracks soon."

She says, "We can do that."

I look north down the tracks. Their graceful curve through the trees and over the creeks toward downtown is different than anything I've ever seen.

"Austin is so photogenic," I say. "We need to get a real camera."

"Right?" Bridget collates some reddish gold hair behind her ear. "It's such a beautiful place."

We hug each other around the waist and face north, wildflowers growing all around us, trees growing taller than the wildflowers, and glassy skyscrapers growing taller than the trees, and we understand why so many people love it here.

Austin, you seem to have it all.

Close to Winter Garden, a Florida Orange Center billboard lures us off the turnpike. The center promises free orange juice samples at exit 304.

Bridget sees the billboard and parks the Silverado in a mostly vacant parking lot.

I take a picture of the Florida Orange Center Seminoles. Bridget wanders off to what turns out to be a fifteen-foot, mummified Florida gator behind thick glass.

“It’s rotting,” says Bridget.

She’s right. There are cobwebs festooned along its teeth, and from the tip of its nose to a plastic tree stump.

I take a couple photos with her iPhone. In the first, she’s acting a bit sexy. In the second, she’s terrified of the gator. Her mouth is open and her fingers are fanned out next to hollowed cheeks.

Inside the Orange Center, we get a noseful of honey and citrus. There’s a shelf of one-quart orange juice bottles for \$2.99. They look like miniature plastic gallon jugs of water, except they’re orange.

We go to the back of the store for free samples. A lady with her arm stabilized in a cast and sling asks if I can push the lever while she holds plastic cups under the spout. I oblige. The generous samples she pours are fresh enough that we buy a quart of goodness for the road.

As the cashier rings up our purchase, I grab a hexagonal mesh of honeycomb for sale on the counter and shake my head. Bridget knows what I’m thinking. One sting from a bee (or wasp) and I go straight into anaphylactic shock.

This honeycomb is my frailty. This honeycomb is my Darwinian soft spot.

1

I don’t know exactly how to start. Michael is the writer. I’m the graduate student. He gave me his computer and asked me to start writing about Austin. He told me to just go ahead and write. He’ll find a way to use whatever I write.

I’ve only read bits and pieces of what he has written, and I only vaguely have an idea of what he wants this *memory* to achieve. I assume writers want to give readers an experience. Writers want to affect readers. But Michael never talks about this.

I feel like I have to help him out. I have to give this memory some effect. Readers are all about the effect. But the snippets I’ve scanned are like a journal. At least that’s the impression I get. I don’t think people want to read some stranger’s journal.

Who is Michael, after all? I mean, I love the guy with all my heart, but not *everyone* loves Michael.

He has no readers.

To get readers he needs to throw in some effect. I think that's why he asked me to add to this memory. *I'm* the effect, which is quite flattering. But, honestly, I can't promise him much. I've never written anything like this, at least not as an adult.

He did give me a clue as to why he wants me to write with him. He said a good way to make a song catchy is to make it a duet.

I know he's on to something here. Think about Scarlett Johansson and Pete Dinklage, or Beyoncé and Jay-Z.

Then think about Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong.

5

Not only are public libraries a celebration of everything true and noble, but they are also the meeting grounds for vagabonds and the mentally ill.

Vagabonds are harmless. They tidily keep to themselves. But they also stink to high heaven, and this holds true for vagabonds in all time zones. Sometimes I'll be sitting on a nice library couch, working on my memory away from the stench of vagabonds on the computer terminals and desks, and this black swan will walk through the door with a plastic grocery bag hanging from his fingers. Without really thinking, he'll snatch a magazine or newspaper and plant right next to me.

A matter of survival, of adapting to my surroundings. My gut wrenches, my nostrils constrict. The smell of iron, layers of dried sweat, grease, bad breath, pee, feces, feet, and cultures of bacteria in their armpits all mix into one revolting scent that kills my appetite.

I begin to worry if this horrid stink will stick to me. Taint me. This stink is enough to keep me off the street. I don't ever want to smell like vagabonds.

A life of hard labor leaves a person smelling differently than a life on the street.

Is it all right if I change seats, I always wonder when this happens, would it be hurtful if I moved to another spot, far away from this rotting potato? Or is tolerance proper? Is this not what being human smells like, after all? Take away the soap, the shampoo and the conditioner, take away the perfume and cologne, take away all these manufactured fragrances, and isn't everyone a rotting potato at heart?

But, when all is said and done, I'd rather be in the company of rotting potatoes than the mentally ill. The mentally ill are imbalanced. They may smell decent sometimes, but they are batty and unpredictable.

They can also be unabashedly lecherous. I'm thinking of one guy in particular. He's somewhere in his 20s, a regular patron of the Twin Oaks Library here in the South Congress area. I'm not sure what his issue is, but his mind is off kilter. I don't know this at first. In fact, my first impression is just that he looks strange, like a leprechaun.

He screws his eyes on Bridget. I try not to notice his conspicuous ogling and go about writing my memory. Bridget is sitting next to me on the garish couch, combing the web on her laptop. She wants to find one of her favorite TV shows.

The leprechaun runs off toward a pot of gold, which happens to be a 30 minute time slot on one of the computer terminals. When his time ends, he takes his spiral notebook and walks right by us. His scent is neutral, but he doesn't seem very clean, especially the soles of his feet, which are stained black.

He takes off his loose flip-flops, wipes his feet, and walks around the library barefoot, pacing like a man trying to figure things out in his house, pacing back and forth. It isn't until he appears from in between the stacks dragging a massive backpack with hiking boots dangling by the laces that I begin to hold this leprechaun suspect.

If I owned a dog, I'm sure it would've growled and barked uncontrollably. Innocent until proven guilty doesn't hold in the world of dog, or at least dogs find guilt using a different kind of process, one more instinctual, one more about survival, not justice, not learned law.

The leprechaun waits for another computer terminal to open. This one is situated closer to Bridget. He hurries the man at this terminal.

He asks, "How much longer do you have?"

"Five minutes," says the man.

It's during this short span that the leprechaun throws propriety out the door and becomes unabashedly lecherous. His eyes penetrate Bridget without a blink. Every time I look toward him, he's digging deeper into her with a diamond encrusted optical bit.

Sometimes he sees me blocking his path, but this doesn't stop him. He's a man capable of inhumanity. I can see it in his gimlet eyes, in his complete disrespect for the ties that bond one person to another.

I can do what Michael asked me to do and write about Austin, but I think he's already doing that, pretty much every day.

Austin is beautiful. I love it here. We haven't seen enough of it yet to really like it, but we've seen enough to know it's physically appealing.

Michael's always quick to point out there's no beach in Austin. We both miss the beach, but we prepared ourselves for this gaping absence. At least that was our plan. And for the most part, Michael doesn't pine for the sea. Only when he's on the phone with friends does he say, "Yeah, but Austin isn't 0.5 miles from the ocean."

He always says *zero-point-five*, not *half-a-mile*, or *around the block*, or *close*. He has a strange way of saying things. He really does. Like he pronounces the silent T in *buffet*.

At first I thought he was trying to be funny, but then I realized he even says the silent T to people he hardly knows.

When I correct him, "You don't say the T. The T is silent. You know that, right?"

He says, "I *know*."

But he still says the T.

Then there are times when he sounds like my grandfather. Like the first time I heard him talk about the ghetto, which is pretty much where I lived when we first met, and he said *hooligans*.

C'mon, who says hooligans? I'll tell you who – my grandfather, not my boyfriend.

Or last night, he comes out and says with a totally straight face, "We could go to New Orleans and eat a poor boy."

"Po' boy!" I tell him, "You mean po' boy!"

He doesn't understand. His reasoning is, "McMurtry wrote poor boy. I think *po' boy* and *poor boy* are alternates. Either way, I know it isn't wrong to say poor boy."

And he starts saying poor boy all night. Language for him isn't something to take lightly. He respects language so much he *over* says things.

He ends up sounding either silly or like my grandfather.

"What?" he asks. "You think I'm a stuffy white guy just because I say poor boy?"

I look him dead in the eyes and say, "Yes. *Hello?*"

Every grandson should keep the memory of his grandfather alive. This isn't meant to be sexist. Please – grandmothers should be brought to life, too.

Long live grandmothers!

But everything in this memory will come as it's remembered.

Bridget, though not a blood relative of Granddad, does more than could ever be done the day she illustrates and watercolors him nursing a green bottle of beer, his hands folded elegantly on his lap.

I take his picture, but Bridget brings him to life in a way only Bridget can do.

Flashback:

Granddad visits me in college. My freshman year he solo-drives from Boca Raton all the way to Hyde Park, Chicago. Granddad is a driver, up there with the best of them. He can drive cross-country without touching the soft shoulder. I've never gone on some long-distance pull with him, but I know he can drive. The road for Granddad is a lapidary gem. He studies the road and sees everything he could ever want to see.

When the day comes that he can't drive anymore, a large part of Granddad dies.

I know this because I see the look in his eyes, at the age of 80, after driving all by himself around 1,330 miles, from Boca to my dormitory at the University of Chicago, and stopping only once in a Tennessee rest area for a couple hours of shuteye.

He carries my golf clubs into my dorm room and sits on the fake leather reading chair. He folds his hands elegantly on his lap, just like Bridget, quite a few years later, paints them, and he's wildly enlightened, like he just got back to The City after spending time in The Forest learning about things and coming to terms with Life.

Granddad, sitting in the faux leather chair, is dapper in a colorful wool sweater. His bright silver hair is parted. Even though I haven't visited him in some time, I can tell he's freshly barbered, straight razor and all, doing the best he can.

Bridget and I are drinking sixteen-ounce cans of Lone Star poolside when a man wearing a sombrero comes out to his patio for a late afternoon smoke.

What I like about his patio is the garden design – succulents in terra cotta pots. I can't call them by their scientific names, but I do see an agave blossom.

"I like your succulents," I say.

"Thank you," says the man in the sombrero.

He lights a cancer stick and drags. For a second, I think I see the color of his eyes, the same aqua blue as the swimming pool. I take a hit of Lone Star. I have no intention of reading the little existential book I have with me. It's dormant on the Chattahoochee.

Dostoevsky's translated words aren't going anywhere without me, I think, but life, this moment, I can't say the same. When outside of your house, Michael, it's critical to live. Save reading for the times when you have nothing better to do than stare at that green wall. When will Bridget decorate it with her artwork? We need to hang some artwork on that wall.

"I do garden design on the side," offers the man in the sombrero when he sees I'm trying to avoid reading. "What do you guys do?"

This is a question I always balk at. When you're a student, people ask what's your major. When you're out of school, people ask what you do for a living. Formalities I'd rather do without.

"I'm starting grad school at UT in the fall," says Bridget, picking up the slack.

"That's a great school," says the man in the sombrero, "the ivy of state schools. What in?"

"Clinical Psychology."

The man in the sombrero laughs and takes a hearty drag. "That's a good thing to be studying around here," he says. He says, "Lots of basket cases in Austin."

Bridget, probably conjuring the leprechaun and the verbally abusive bastard child in our building, agrees wholeheartedly. Her dimples pucker as she swigs Lone Star.

"I'm unemployed," I say, not wanting to shirk the question.

The man in the sombrero buoyantly nods three times. "Okay," he says, "cool. I'm Abe."

On this overcast day in Austin, Bridget decides to buy a camera she found last night on craigslist.

I understand we need a camera if we want to capture Austin and shape it to our liking. The iPhone won't do Austin justice.

There's too much green energy here, too much physical beauty willing to be digitally preserved.

But this need to preserve shouldn't get in the way of appreciating Austin's beauty as it lives. We must remember to experience things with our own senses rather than once removed through the lens of a camera.

The guy we're buying it from has rusty straight hair that falls to his traps. He wears the superfluous beanie. He has a barcode tater tot on the underside of his wrist. His cotton tee is burnt orange with a white and featureless longhorn centerpiece.

"The only reason I'm selling this camera," he says, "is because I got a digital SLR. It's necessary for my work now."

"You take photos for a living?" I ask.

"And video. I do production work. This camera was a great starter camera. The only reason it's a step under a DSLR is because the lens is fixed. Other than that, it has all the features and capabilities of most DSLRs on the market today."

"Really? So a fixed lens is the only difference between this and a DSLR?"

"Yep. That's what makes this is a bridge camera. But believe me, it can do everything. I know you'll love this camera. It takes great images in auto. And if you want more control, throw it in manual."

"Can you give us a quick overview?" asks Bridget.

We're sitting outside on the patio of a nearby coffee shop. The patio overlooks a garden/greenhouse that sells plants and pots and general horticulture equipment.

"Sure," he says. "You can download the manual online, but I know how it is reading those things."

Apart from a primer on our new used camera, which really is quite nifty, beanie man also discloses the location in Austin that parties like Miami:

“Take Cesar Chavez west till you get to the end. There’s a lake there with boats to drink on. People go there to get down Miami style.”

He nods his head and looks at Bridget for approval. He doesn’t know partying in the style of Miami didn’t interest us in Miami, so it probably won’t interest us here.

“Where are you from?” I ask, always curious about people’s origins.

“I was born here,” he says. “In Austin.”

3

There are a lot of things that define who we are, or at least have the ability to define who we are, if we let them.

I’d like to think I don’t let things define me. This isn’t true, though. There are many things that define me. All I have to do is think about it, and I see how many things define me, and I see how it is I am the way I am.

Cross-country driving is one of those things. The road. The interstate. The highway. Four or more wheels rolling on asphalt for what seems like forever, but is in fact an easily quantifiable distance.

Miami Beach to the South Congress area in Austin is 1,350.8 miles if we hop on the turnpike, or 22 hours 45 minutes with traffic. Bridget’s iPhone estimates our travel time using the basic algebraic formula $r \times t = d$.

We can count on this basic formula on the road, like we can count on paradise in Miami Beach.

I wonder what we’ll be able to count on in Austin?

5

Michael is the least street-smart person I know. It’s pretty incredible how blind he is to what’s going on around him. Even when it’s still daylight, he’s totally oblivious of the most obvious criminal activities happening right before his eyes.

I seriously can’t believe him!

He tells me he was sheltered growing up, but on the walk to the library today it really hits me: Michael wasn't only sheltered, he was kept in the dark at the expense of common sense.

He can't blame his eyesight either. Not this time. He's wearing his eyeglasses. It's true he usually doesn't, but he makes a point to wear them when we're going to the library, in case the leprechaun is snooping in between the shelves.

Michael has his guard up when it comes to the leprechaun.

I'll admit I'm paranoid about the leprechaun, too. The leprechaun freaks me out.

Wait. I'm getting sidetracked.

A man in a large yellow t-shirt is walking several steps ahead of us on our way to the library. He lives in The Oaks, in the building next to ours. I think he's Mexican, but he could be Colombian or Greek or a New Yorker for all I know.

Michael is talking about how he doesn't like the sky here. He thinks the Austin sky is too white. He thinks it has too much glare, like a napalm sky. He speaks strongly about how the hazy Austin sky doesn't do it for him.

"Not compared to the sky in Miami," he says. "The sky in Miami made we *want* to go outside, even during the heat of day. But here in Austin, I'd prefer to stay inside. The sky here is brutal. It's punishing. It's unfriendly, like a sky full of napalm fires."

I'm not sure from what book he gets this weird simile. I know he has never in his life seen a napalm sky. I also know he recently finished reading *The Quiet American*, so that probably has something to do with it.

The man in the large yellow t-shirt is now a few yards ahead, north on Congress. He doesn't really seem like a shady character at all. When I spy him spinning a lanyard around his index finger and whistling catchy ditties, it doesn't seem like he'd belong to the underworld. But it doesn't surprise me.

Michael is thinking to himself, staring at the napalm sky, when the deal goes down. I don't call his attention to it, since it's so glaringly obvious. The man walks straight to the bus stop, drops a baggy of something into a duffel bag, and another man wearing a sun-bleached trench coat – even though it's 100 degrees out – smiles from earlobe to earlobe, checks what's in the sack, zips his duffel bag, and claps hands with Mister Yellow.

"What's up?" says the overly happy man in the trench coat. He casually sucks on a bit of cigarette. His fingertips are greasy.

"What's going on, bro?" replies the man in the yellow t-shirt. With his back facing us, he lifts one loafer onto the bus bench and turns contrapposto to make

sure we aren't street smart.

I feel like saying, "Well, *that* was pretty obvious!" I feel like calling him out, but I know Michael wouldn't approve. He prefers to fly under the radar. He doesn't like it when I draw unnecessary attention to us. But still!

"Did you see what just happened there?" I ask, when we're out of earshot.

"No," Michael says, pushing his eyeglasses higher on the ridge of his nose.

"You didn't notice the drug deal?" I ask.

"Drug deal?"

"*Hello?*" I exclaim. "The guy in the yellow t-shirt?"

"You mean the one who was walking just ahead of us from The Oaks?"

"Yes! He's clearly a drug dealer."

"Really?"

"Definitely. He dropped a plastic baggy into some guy's bag and then shook hands to get the cash, more of a high five, but to the side. Classic drug deal."

"I saw the two guys meeting, but I figured they were having an unexpected reunion."

"Are you kidding me? Ha! The guy in the trench coat *sure* was happy to reunite. Did you see his smile?"

"I did see him smile. He looked *very* happy." Michael laughs. "Was it weed?"

"I don't know," I say, slightly annoyed. "It was all wrapped up."

"So, a guy in The Oaks sells weed?" Michael amuses himself. "I wonder if he has some good regs? Like those Jamaican regs we had in Miami?"

"What I loved about that drug deal was the handclap at very the end," I say, trying to teach him about the street and get off the topic of weed. "It's the same way kids pass notes in school."

"Keen observation," says Michael. "We learn survival skills early on."

We?

I'm not so sure Michael ever learned this set of survival skills, to be honest. I wonder if he ever passed notes, or if he even knew passing was going on all around him. He probably thought everyone was being especially friendly. Maybe

he even felt left out. You gotta love the guy.

But Michael's total lack of common sense doesn't stop there. On the walk home from the library, at the exact same bus stop on Congress, we see a teenager who makes no attempt at being discrete about what he has in his hands. I don't say anything at first because the man in the large yellow t-shirt is nearby, leaning against a fence post.

He's still twirling a lanyard, but the ditty whistling has stopped.

Once we're out of earshot, "Did you see what that kid was holding?"

"What kid?" asks Michael.

"At the bus stop," I say. "He was the only person there."

"No, I didn't see him holding anything."

"You're joking, right?"

"I was looking at the cell phone on his lap. It had *wicked* flames painted on it."

"So you didn't see the bag of weed in his hands?"

"Are you serious?" asks Michael. "He had *weed*? Out in the open?"

"Yes! And the guy with the yellow shirt was still hanging around."

"I *did* see him," says Michael, acting smart all of a sudden. "I thought you were going to point him out, but instead you point out a whole bag of weed! Incredible. I must be blind. Did it look good?"

8

Jon does tell us we might need to change the oil in the Silverado. He says, "If the light comes on, you should change the oil. 40 bucks at Jiffy Lube."

Since neither Bridget nor I have ever seen the light Jon speaks of, we keep an eye out for anything unusual, expecting it to be some icon on the dashboard, probably yellow or orange.

We don't think it's the simple sentence that shows in the odometer panel every time we start the truck:

CHANGE ENGINE OIL

We figure Jon has seen the exact same sentence for a short while and is waiting for the yellow or orange icon to shine.

Once that icon shines, the oil needs to be changed. But for the time being, everything is as it should be, or at least how Jon left it, so the oil doesn't need to be changed yet.

9

My cousin, a decade my junior, comes over to visit us in Miami Beach. Our place is in disarray. Boxes are stacked in the corner and furniture is getting ready to be sold on craigslist. Honeyed Cat sits on a pile of unmade cardboard boxes, which she thinks of as her scratcher.

Shaggy makes his typical entrance. He carries three cone-shaped joints with him. He sticks the trio in between his lips and stretches his arms to absorb the glory of being alive and in the company of family.

“Think this'll do?” he asks. His sarcasm is duly noted.

We adjourn to the bedroom, close the door, open the jalousie window, and get stony.

What I like about Shaggy is that he calls me Coz, a valid Scrabble word. There is truth in being called Coz. It's special. It means something.

Dear Lord, what are we if not a relation to someone else?

“I'm good.” This is me speaking, informing Shaggy I've had enough. He remains silent and treats himself to another voluminous pull.

Then he clears his pink lungs and asks, “Are you sure?”

Fragrant smoke enshrouds my face. It's enough persuasion for me to say, “All right.”

Shaggy extends his arm and laughs, “That wasn't too hard, Coz.”

“No,” I say, hoarding another pull and smiling impishly. I say, “It wasn't.”

7

In writing this memory of our life, I don't want to restrict myself to a straight line of causal prose. One section doesn't necessarily cause or affect the next, or even have a say in the general drift.

I don't want to dwell on the structure of this story, but I do want to say the *I* you are reading right now *is* the writer of this memory, or at least most of it.

But this isn't a journal. It's a memory meant to entertain.

Frida Kahlo painted from her life in the same way I write from mine. The richest aspect of her life was *her* life. Frida painted from what she experienced firsthand:

I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best.

9

The balcony is a nice place to sit and talk, especially when you're drinking bananas, mango, apple, and tangelos soaked and cooled overnight in Italian Pinot Grigio.

I'm telling Bridget about the children's book I read at the library about Steve Jobs. Last week I learned about Fidel Castro, and this week I learned about Steve Jobs.

For a long time I've stayed away from biographies. The last biography I sat down with and learned from was *Bo Knows* by the great crossover athlete, Bo Jackson. But biographies can unintentionally keep people low, not by persuading them they aren't good enough to even pick an apple off a tree, but by making people enamored, even blinded by the unparalleled successes of these achievers, and all of a sudden it's enough that these people like you and me accomplished so much. All of a sudden, their mind-blowing life moves you straight into complacency, however enlightened you may be, you're just complacent: happy enough with everything you can let things ride like they are. That's my problem with biographies. The fantastic story of another person's life can suddenly become comfortably stifling.

It's kind of how I feel after I walk out of a really good movie. Every really good movie makes me feel the same way. Somewhere near the beginning, I want to stand up and leave and create a piece of art. I feel like I can do it, all I have to do is start writing.

But, invariably, I stay and watch the entire movie because it *is* a really good movie. I stay in my seat and keep my eyes focused and follow the dialogue all the

way till the very end. Then, I walk out and feel totally happy. The inexorable itch to create isn't there anymore. In its place there's a complacent man: comfortably stifled and eager to relate what I just watched rather than create something of my own.

Watching really good movies, for me, is like reading about the giant achievers, or the makers of our history. I read about these giant achievers, these history makers, and I am totally content by the very end. Their story, somewhere near the beginning, makes me feel optimistic, like I can do it. I can be Michael Davidson, the writer. I can put the book down and reach the ranks of the great achievers.

But, invariably, I read the entire book. Follow it closely word for word until the very end, and then I'm satisfied with what I've done. I've learned about Fidel Castro, or I've learned about Steve Jobs, or Bo Jackson, or Larry McMurry of Archer County.

I not only learned, but I also felt really good doing it. Their stories are so spectacular, so against-the-odds, simply reading them puts me in a state of beatific awe, or, better yet, grace, and what's even better: I can relate their stories to other people and experience grace again.

It's a beautiful and strange thing, being able to identify with someone so closely they make you feel something real, like *Making Dreams Come True*, like having a vision and carrying it through to completion, because they've achieved everything *and some*.

But you haven't done a damn thing except read a biography.

We're sitting on our new balcony in Austin, Bridget and I, sipping pinot-soaked fresh mango, and I become inspired by the illustrious story of another person who doesn't know me and probably wouldn't give me a second of his time if I were to tell him my lackluster story. This doesn't keep me from trying my best to infect Bridget with my complacent admiration for Mister Think Different.

Steve Jobs travels to India, seeks gurus, lives in ashrams, becomes green, and he has no idea what he wants to do. That's why he's in India, to figure some shit out. It occurs to him, while witnessing serious poverty, Thomas Edison did more for people than any guru.

Steve Jobs has an epiphany, and he returns to Silicon Valley, back in the days when it had orchards, and starts Apple. Steve Jobs is a history maker. He made history doing exactly what he envisioned when he left India: using electricity to improve quality of life worldwide.

There. Grace.

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